

GOVERNMENT HOUSE
NEW DEL I.



Aide-de-Camp's Library

JUNGLE DRAMAS
AND
THE SOUL OF INDIA
(In Verse)

BY
"SNILLOC"

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To

MY MOTHER

The hand that rocked my cradle
wrote this book

AUTHOR'S NOTE

These poems originally appeared in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and are reproduced by kind courtesy of the Editor. They are dramas, but there was a bigger drama behind their writing. "Young John Crane" and "The Black Panther of Agajhiri" were composed in Tanganyika by the bedside of my wife. Stricken with rheumatic fever, she was not expected to recover; and nothing but poetry would ease her pain. Having read to her twice over every book of poems on which I could lay hands in that wild spot, I started telling her these stories in verse. Providence helped; her life was saved.

FOREWORD

Mr. Harper-Collins, who is a valued member of my Editorial Staff—and likes to spell his name backwards as a *nom-de-plume*—has asked me to write a foreword for this little book of Jungle Dramas in verse. As a fellow lover of the Jungle I am happy to comply, for very many happy days and nights spent in India's vast and fascinating forests from the Himalayas to Kanara and further south, tell me that the author has caught the correct jungle atmosphere, and his facile and prolific pen interprets jungle moods for all lovers of adventure. Nature is not *always* so "red in tooth and claw," and those who are fortunate enough to have time to linger in forest glades or on grassy slopes, to keep close to Mother Earth, know how much she has to teach our erring "civilisations." Those who know jungle life will want to read these dramas in verse; and those who don't will wish to read Nature's own vast and entrancing book of the jungle after enjoying the verses.

"The Illustrated
Weekly of India."
Bombay, July, 1943.

Stanley Jepson

TO HELP INDIA'S WAR-BLINDED

People long to do something for the young men - and there are young women, too - who have embarked on war service, laughing, strong, full of the fire of youth, to return blinded, shattered, helpless. And so, when in 1915 Sir Arthur Pearson founded St. Dunstan's to give them inspiration, practical assistance and the best training modern ingenuity could provide, there was a generous response from all over the Empire. It is amazing how many tasks a trained blind person can do just as perfectly as seeing people can, and how fully he can take his place in society, not only in a wage-earning job, but in home and family, in games, literature and music, in local activities and in public affairs. A man without sight still has a good brain, sound muscles, skill and a will to work - indeed, a longing to use that brain and to apply those idle muscles so that he may rid himself of the killing monotony of endless darkness, the dread enemy of the blind.

St. Dunstan's, begun in London, has spread throughout the Empire, and India today has its own St. Dunstan's where the war-blinded men of India have shown that they have the same keenness and capacity as Empire soldiers elsewhere - qualities unsuspected under the soul-destroying tradition of helplessness and beggary of the old days.

TO HELP INDIA'S WAR-BLINDED

St. Dunstan's is warmly grateful to its generous friends who make its work possible, and to "Snilloc" for kindly giving his royalties from this edition to its present task in India. We of St. Dunstan's hope that there will be a rapid growth of interest not only in the welfare of the gallant war-blinded, but also in the many thousands of civilian blind whose lot is still tragic and unhappy.

(Sir) CLUTHA MACKENZIE,
St. Dunstan's Hostel for the War-Blinded,
54, Rajpur Road, Dehra Dun, U. P.

Dehra Dun :

19th June, 1945.

CONTENTS

	Page
<i>Author's note</i>	iv
<i>Foreword</i>	v
<i>'To help India's War-blinded'</i> ...	vi
<i>List of Illustrations</i>	x
Young John Crane 	1
The Black Panther of Agajhirri ...	39
The Chanda Tiger 	56
The Retaming of Maung Gale ...	79
The Jungle's Night Parade ...	93
The Soul of India 	103

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	To face page
Beaters going to take post ...	24
Machan for daylight small game shooting	27
Pad elephant	35
Bhil Archer	39
Old Ookaria	40
Another method of shooting ...	42
"His small grand-daughter" ...	45
"For many days no man has come his way"	65
Cheetal (spotted deer) at home ...	66
Decorated elephant	73
Dancing peacock	94
"Save a haunting sense of beauty" ...	103
"In pillared, durbar hall"	104
"Where wealth and fashion meet" ...	105
"Their dainty white sails spread" .	106
"Marble mausoleum, lovely, long-lasting!"	107
"Where the dhows of the Arabs go down to sea"	109
"O man of ash and bowl"	111
"With voluptuous movements and twirling hips"	112
"In field and in village, beneath sunny skies"	113
"Thy flowers!" (Gold Mohur tree in fore-ground)	114
"Thy dances!" (Krishna and the Gopis) ...	115
"In make-up that takes many hours to put on" (Kathakali dancer) .. .	116
"Thypeople!"	117
"Your mothers!"	119
"As sets the sun in roseate glory far" .	120

YOUNG JOHN CRANE

WHO tells fine tales of derring-do,
Of love, and man's endeavour great,
Must some day tell of young John Crane,
Who battled 'gainst a ghastly fate.

One son of many, young John Crane
By all his brothers was despised;
His father hated sight of him;
His mother o'er him often cried;

His neighbours laughed derisively
Whene'er he passed; and every girl,
Who saw him, took the chance which came
At him some bitter taunt to hurl;

And this was so surprising for
He'd face and form like some Greek god;
In stature tall and whippy, he
Was strong as any strong steel cord.

All gifts of God he had but one,
And for that one he oft did mourn,
For, sad to say, poor young John Crane
Was cursed...he was a coward born.

No heart had he; he could not face
His compeers, be they great or small,
Nor could he battle with them in
Their various games of bat and ball.

He tried to fight, he tried to play,
He tried, like Proverb's worm, to turn;
The more he tried the more he failed,
And brighter did his self-shame burn.

No helping hand came out to him
Except his mother's; how she tried
To help him overcome his dread;
Born cowardice her hopes defied.

Till, in the end, her saddened heart
Gave up the great, uneven fight;
She died, and when they laid her out
She looked so lovely, frail and white.

And as John Crane looked down at her,
With tears of sorrow in his eyes,
He cursed aloud the Providence
Which could for her such end devise.

"Oh, mother, mother mine," he wept,
"A son like me why did God send
To you, who were so brave and good?
My mother and my only friend!"

Thenceforward John Crane lived alone
With books; his thoughts, like plume of raven,
Were not fit company for him,
Men had no use for him, the craven.

But never did the young man cease
To hope to conquer his sad fate;
He kept alive, he kept him fit,
"I'll win," he cried, "or now or late.

"But in the end I'll win the fight!
When I am dead, all men shall say,
'A coward was young John Crane born,
A hero in this grave we lay.'"

And so he vainly fought and strove,
And, cringing, went upon his way,
Despised and shunned by one and all,
Yet saying, "E'en curs must have their day!"

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THE scene is changed, and changed
the metre too;
From four to five it jumps that I may tell
The better of how John Crane came to Ind,
And of the things which there to him befell.

So there and then, upon the Ballard Pier,
While Thomas Cook's bright myrmidons and bold
Struggled with kit and Customs forms,
John Crane
Sat down to have his future fortune told.

His heart was light, for he had left behind
Those men who knew and scorned
him; over here
A few days' respite he would have before
'Twas known that he was craven, full of fear.

The Seer's palm he crossed with five rupees,
And tendered him his hands that he might read
What Fortune had in store for young
John Crane,
Whose trunk was a tree, whose heart a weed.

But when the Seer had looked into those hands,
The smile persuasive on his lips just froze,
And, shaking like a very aspen, he
Let go the hands as to his feet he rose.

"Sahib," he said, "I hardly like to tell
About the things which in your hands I see.
You've paid me, but I'll give your money back;
Or if you bid me tell, so shall it be.

"We fortune-teller, sahib, oft-times prey
Upon our fellow-beings' credulity;
At other times strange thing in people's hands,
By grace of God, we are allowed to see.

"And to those people, sahib, we cannot lie,
For if we did, the gods would blind our eyes.
Your future, sahib, is very, very strange;
I will not tell, or you wish otherwise?"

The craven heart of Crane began to cringe,
But, with an effort, he controlled its fear,
And haltingly replied to that man, saying:
"Please tell me all, or good or bad, I'll hear."

(And this is what the fortune-teller said,
To John Crane there on distant Ballard Pier)
The fates are all against you, sahib, I see,
Strange pictures in your hands, and all are clear;

All but the last one, that one's end is hid
In mists opaque perchance they
mean your end ?
Or else, perchance, those mists might indicate
That beyond which no man can see.....

A bend in your life's road? But,
 be that as it may,
The other pictures, one and all, portray
You as a coward fleeing from dangers which
Are common in this land on any day.

The things for which no others care a straw
Are mountains to you, sahib;

from them you run.
You are the ridicule of all alike,
The butt for jokes, the target for all fun.

He looked into John's face and at his frame,
He said: " I know not how these things can be,
For you are mighty, sahib,with thews of steel.
But I can only tell you what I see."

Again John Crane drove back his cringing fear.
“What was that picture that you saw...
the last...”

The one whose end you sought
but could not find?
The others do not matter!" thus he asked.

The fortune-teller shook his turbaned head
And stroked his long grey beard thoughtfully;
Into his eye, so pale, great sorrow crept,
But yet he answered John Crane truthfully.

"Sahib, I know you not nor where you go,
But into forest lands your path will lead;
For in a forest is that last scene cast.
Take heed of what I say, take heed, take heed!

"You and two others to that forest go.....
A great, stark forest, bare of leaf and brown.
Your one companion is a man, and he
Stands looking at you with a deep, dark frown.

"The other is a woman, sahib. She's young;
Her face is oval; figure like a wand,
Tall, slim and supple; and her eyes are brown,
'Twixt him and her there seems to be a bond.

"She sits upon a tree, you stand below...
You and that man...and with you are three
Men of my race. All five of you look down
At something on the ground which I can't see.

"And presently you start to move away,
Leaving the girl perched safely in the tree.
Your four companions are agog to go,
But you go with them most reluctantly.

"As she looks after you, her lovely eyes
Are full of scorn. She speaks. I cannot hear
The words she utters, but it seems to me
She is upbraiding you for showing fear.

"The picture changes then, sahib, and I see
A sight to chill the heart of any man!
The lady stands alone beneath a tree,
Stark paralysed by fear, which well I can

"Believe, for, rushing on her at great speed,
A monster tiger comes; its dreadful jowl
Is bloody, flecked with bloody foam its sides.
Its ears, blood-flecked, lie back like scarlet cowl.

"Your four companions rush to help the girl,
But whether they will reach in time or not
I cannot tell, for that I cannot see,
The end being hidden in Fate's melting-pot.

"And you, sahib, you are there.

You stand inert!

Stark terror has you in its awful hold.
You cannot make a move to save her life,
And.....that is all there is that can be told.

"The end I cannot see. Alas! it seems
That nought can save that

woman from her doom.

And you, Unfortunate, who made no move,
You will be spat upon in life. Your tomb

"Will merit desecration!" "No it won't!"
Said John Crane slowly, "I will die before."
"You won't!" the fortune-teller crisply said,
"You'll funk the shortcut to the Other Shore."

So, with the lightness of his heart dispelled,
John Crane went on his way from old Bombay.
(A veil across the next few years I draw,
And then I open with his passion play.)

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The scene is changed. 'Tis Easter now,
The time of moons and agony,
When we think on what Christ went through
Far back in old Gethsemene.

The stage is set. The curtain lifts
Upon a scene so wild and free,
So beautiful that, to believe,
We must ourselves come there and see.

Encupped by hills, dark forest clad,
A sapphire lake lies twinkling
Within its marge of emerald reeds
Moharli's lake, bewildering!

At early dawn 'tis blue, just blue;
In sunlight, sheet of polished steel;
At sunset, carmined battlefield;
In starlight, has sweet chimes appeal.

At moonrise, oh, a shimmering field
Of golden buttercups at play,
With gentle breezes coercing
Their yellow heads to nod one way.

At morn and eve the antlered stag,
In company with his shy does,
Comes down to it to slake his thirst,
Then turns to feed or find repose.

The grunting boar, with whetted tusk;
The muntjak, all its nerves on edge;
The snuffling bear, the peacock proud,
Come down to it. At stony ledge

Where is no slush or caking mud,
The great cats come to have their drink

Great lordly tigers, striped and huge,
And panthers from which all things shrink.

And birds in shoals come down all day
To sing the praises of the lake,
To preen their feathers on its shores,
Of its cool waters to partake.

By one fair margin, on a mound,
There stands a thick-thatched forest hut
Surrounded by a garden fair,
And fruit trees, watered by a rut.

In all this beauty, mellow calm,
There yet was sorrow, anguish too.....
Such anguish as He must have known
Who gave his life for me and you.

But with that anguish yet there came
The resurrection's promise fair;
As Christ, so John Crane knew it not,
But laboured on in his despair.

For in the moonlight on this night
He sat beside the lake in pain;
From others in the house he'd fled
Because he could not stand the strain.

Of their light chatter, which was hushed
Whene'er he chanced to come their way;
And their side glances he could not
Abide. They filled him with dismay.

But most of all the wretched man
The company of Helen feared ...
Sweet Helen Dring, whom he so loved
And who his love with scorn besmeared.

Her father, grey-haired Harry Dring,
Conservator of Forests was,
And he had brought his girl and friends
To spend their Easter out-of-doors.

And though he disliked young John Crane,
He had to have him there as well,
For that was young John's charge, and he
Alone about it things could tell.

And young John hated to be there,
The glances veiled, the tittering,
Were gall and wormwood to his soul,
The vinegar of suffering.

So, like a beaten cur, he slunk
For sympathy to that great lake,
And by it sat him down to nurse
A sorry heart which soon must break.

And as he sat there, lonely, sunk
In bitterness he heard two speak.
Their words went through him like a sword,
From wound of which man's life must leak.

The speakers knew not he was there,
And so their words were open, straight;
From 'neath the moonlit mango trees
Some came with dreadful, stinging weight,

While others were like healing balm.
But John Crane did not feel their soothe;
He only felt the sting of those
Which were intolerant and rude.

First spoke Miss Mary Martin, saying:
"Helen, that poor man loves you so!
His great blue eyes, with hunger filled,
Follow you where'er you go.

"He loves you with a passion great,
A vital thing, so binding, true!
His love the poor man has not told
Because he is afraid of you.

"Afraid that you will fling back in
His face his heart, and heap on him
Your bitter scorn. That, I feel sure,
Would wring the life-blood out of him."

Then Helen spoke. Her voice was ice.
It hurt; nor lash of whip could be
More torturing to him who heard,
And hearing strove, but could not flee.

"That man! That coward! Dreadful cur!
I would not...and there is no dearth
Of men I would not mate with him
Were he the last man on this earth.

"He makes my very flesh to creep!
His presence here pollutes the air!
Oh, why did God a craven heart
Place in a body, oh, so fair?"

Then Mary spoke. A woman she
As woman truly ought to be,
For though of good looks she was shorn
In her a heart of gold was born:

“Helen, how great is that man’s need!
He loves you. Help him to succeed.
Beside him stand and brave the day,
Beside him go upon life’s way.

“His mind and body both are clean.
He is a noble man, I ween.
A hero! he is fighting hard
Against a fate which *must* retard.

“To you by God it is now given
To piece again his heart so riven.
His form and features you adore.
Well, make them yours for evermore.

“Don’t shirk the sacred duty which
God puts upon you. From the ditch
Just try to lift him, as, I’m sure,
His mother must have tried before.”

Then Helen spoke, saying, “I won’t do
Those things, but Mary, why don’t you,
Who champion here to me his cause,
Take him who has so many flaws?”

"I hate the man and I despise
Him much. But, since you are so wise,
Why don't you marry him and see
If aught but coward he could be?"

Poor Mary cried a cry of pain
At her friend's deep and sour disdain:
"I wish to God that it could be,
But John Crane's not in love with *me*.

"He loves *you* Helen. Worships you.
His love is pure and very true.
You say that you despise his state?
One day you'll love—and love too late!

"You'll love John Crane when he has won
The fight he fights, and when that's done
You'll reach for what you cast away—
And fail. God help you in that day!"

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THE voices ceased and died away,
But Crane sat on till break of day.
The air about the lake was chill,
Yet from his brow there oft did spill

The sweat of his great agony
Born of the bitter words which she,
The one he loved, had uttered, and
About his heart an iron band
Constricting tightened, till he swore
That he could face the world no more.

He rose and to the lake went down
In it his craven heart to drown;
But when he reached its moonlit shore
He heard the Seer's words once more,
And, knowing so he could not die,
Returned and sat down with a sigh.

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AND that was Crane's Gethsemane,
There by the lake of Moharli.
Well crucified were Hope and Love:
No help he got from God above.
As Christ, so he his torment bore.
He did not know that at Life's door
He stood. That Mary Martin sought
That which for money can't be bought.....
God's aid for him. He wrong believed
God would not help one who'd relieved
His mind in days now long gone by,
By cursing Him who reigned on high.

Though craven he, and fearing foes,
He yet superior to some rose;
For when his thoughts to solace turned,
He beat them back with scorn that burned.
Not brave enough to take his life,
He, struggling, carried on the strife.

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The scene is changed. In sunset's afterglow
A lordly tiger lies upon a slab
Of stone which, at the mouth of his dark cave,
Projects from out a hillside, bare and drab.

In that dark cave, so cool, the creature passed
The burning hours of yet another day,
And now upon his sill he panting lies
Till it is time to go upon his way.

First to a distant fissure in some rocks,
Which holds sweet water right throughout
the year,
He'll go; and when his thirst is fully quenched,
He'll stalk and kill his prey, some ox or deer.

He yawns, a wide luxurious yawn, and licks
His heavy jowl with pink, enroughened tongue.
Then, rising slowly, slouches down the hill,
And lo! his wanderings have now begun.

The moon, just rising,
 casts long shadows, black
And clear-cut, in each silent sylvan glade,
And by cool zephyrs sighing on their way
A soothing, rustling, murmuring sound is made.

Along a broad, bare, well-kept fireline
The lord of all creation slouches, he
Is camouflaged so well that he enjoys
Complete invisibility.

At steady pace he goes upon his way,
But suddenly he stops to look and stare
At something which upon that fireline stands.
He wonders how on earth that thing came there!

It is, ye gods ! a tender buffalo calf,
Which, tethered to a log, reflectively
Stands chewing at the cud of straw, which it
Grinds slowly 'twixt its jaws effectively.

Its large soft eyes are vacant,
and its thoughts.....
Well, who can read its thoughts?
but one may guess
They're lingering in Elysian pastures where
The grass is always green and grows no less.

Quick from off the line the tiger jinks;
Behind a bush he crouches, flat and low.
How can a bulk so huge so quickly move?
His movements should be ponderous and slow.

While crouching there with staring eyes,
the beast
Begins to marvel at this stroke of luck;
That calf tied there, so near the water too!
Will save the toil of stalking active buck.

Some careless villager, the tiger thinks,
Has left this dainty morsel here to wait
Till he comes back to fetch it.

Well, he'll find
When he returns he has returned too late!

A feast? 'Tis more than that! A godsend? Yes.
A chance which surely will not come again.
(The tiger is not one to spurn a chance
As Helen Dring once spurned poor
young John Crane.)

From shadow-point to shadow-point he creeps;
Though awkward-crouched, his movements
are not strained;
His action perfect, not a sound he makes
Until the chosen vantage point is gained.

Then out into the silent, starlit space
He darts his mighty body at the prey;
One paw swings back, to land with
fearful force.....
And that is all there is to that quick play.

Beneath the tiger's bulk the buffalo calf
Sinks quivering, lifeless; fastened in its throat
Are yellow fangs, which open out the way
For "stripes" to suck the hot
blood with great gloat.

Anon he rises, on his haunches squats,
Licks gory chops, looks fondly at the kill;
Then, seizing it by its poor, broken neck,
He drags it off to where he'll eat his fill.

First water, cool, refreshing, just a scrap;
He's full of blood, so just a lap or two.
Then back he comes to his small buffalo calf
And guts it clean with skill and much ado.

Next from around the tail he takes some bites,
The fattest rump steaks, oh so succulent!
He's full. He therefore hides the carcass and
Lies down to sleep, he feels so somnolent.

And last, but not the least,
 is young John Crane,
By hot suns bronzed and still like
 Grecian god.....
Phoebus Apollo and strong Hercules
Rolled into one by freak of Fortune's nod.

Before them stand the two who bring the news:
"Tie up *machans*," says Dring,
 "but take great care
To make no noise in their vicinity,
Or else the tiger you will surely scare."

Shikari Bali makes a deep *salaam*,
His wizened face illumined by a grin;
"I know that, *sahib*," he says. "I will now go."
And trots away, so little, lean and thin.

And presently he leaves the camp again
With others, carrying light string
 cots and poles,
All ready cut, and several coils of rope:
They move away on bare, calloused, hard soles.

They reach the spot where, on the
previous day,
They tied the buffalo calf as tiger bait;
They choose the trees from which,
in years gone by,
Fast bullets have sprung out as tiger fate.

In silence they perform their many tasks,
The frameworks tie, the cots upon them fix.
And round each cot they string
a screen of leaves;
Old Bali's up to all the cutest tricks.

And when, at noon, they reach the camp again,
They find a hundred beaters gathered there.
Some with bows and arrows, some with drums,
And, but for loin-cloths, all their bodies bare.

Soon after noon they start: the beaters go
By route circuitous to their posts, which they
Know well of old; the others quietly go
And climb into the trees which block the way.

Beside her father Helen Dring sits down
And watches John Crane climb into his tree:
"He'll funk it if it comes his way," she says,
And old Dring nods his head all-knowingly.



"Machan for daylight small game shooting"

Photo: S. JERSON

So musing, he slouched quietly off
 with rhythmic tread and slow,
From side to side his great head swung,
 his long, lax tail lay low,
The muscles 'neath his striped skin
 rolled rippling as he moved,
The poetry of motion he,
 each part well oiled and grooved.
He neared the open fireline
 nor stopped he to take stock,
The silent Gonds behind him knew
 their job, he got no shock
To startle him or make him feel all
 was not well today,
To make him gallop, trot or run,
 or turn to break away.
So on he came with head held low,
 eyes swept an arc before,
But never did he think to look
 above the forest floor.

* * *

The watchers in the trees sat still,
 as still as still could be;
When yet a long way off, his massive
 form they well could see.
"He's making, dad," said Helen Dring
 in whisper soft and low,

“For Coward Crane. I wonder if
he'll shirk and let him go?”

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How still it was and hot as hell!
the lull which must presage
The bursting of titanic storms when
warring factions rage
When John Crane saw that monster
come, his heart within him failed;
His sun-bronzed face, despite the bronze,
to yellow whiteness paled;
His one desire, his greatest urge,
to let the creature go;
He thought he heard his mother's voice
saying sharply to him NO!
With shaking hands he raised his gun,
the safety catch turned back,
Then was the silence broken by
its sharp, stacatto crack.
The tiger felt a red-hot pain sear
through him like a flame;
With savage twitch his long,
lax tail erect behind him came;
With claws deep biting into earth
he forward sprang as he
Acknowledged John Crane's shot with
grunts, deep-throated, two or three.

Then, as the monster forward surged,
 John Crane to stop him tried;
By shaking hands his aim despoiled,
 his bullet flew far wide.

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And so the tiger passed along,
 a wound of death had he;
Behind him pandemonium reigned,
 each beater in a tree
Yelled as he'd never yelled before
 and thwacked a drum or tin:
Ne'er heard, I ween, by any man
 was such an awful din.

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But presently the noise died down;
 when all was still again
Old Dring from his *machan* called
 out to ask the news of Crane.
"I think my first shot hit," said Crane.
 "The second one went wide.
I cannot see the tiger now,
 but hope to God he's died!"
Dring heard, and on his whistle blew
 three blasts both long and shrill,

Which told the beaters in their trees
that there had been no kill,
But that a wounded tiger had
gone forward on its way.
They knew there surely would be some
grave trouble on this day.

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THE scene is changed. About a spot
stand grouped
Three men from Ind and two from
England's shore;
They look at what the Seer could not see...
Fresh blood and many a deep and angry score.
A little distance from them Helen sits,
Impatient, chafing in her branching tree,
About whose foot are grouped the beaters, all
Watching the five with great anxiety.

"You hit him, *sahib*," says Bali.

"There's no doubt
That he is wounded sore and soon must die.
Let's leave him now, tomorrow we can bring
The village buffaloes when the sun is high

"And find him. If he lives the buffaloes will
Charge down on him in mass and trample him.
That method will ensure that there shall be
No risk to any human life or limb."

"I don't agree," said Dring. "I do not see Why, since he's sorely wounded, we should not Follow at once and make an end of him? He must be nearly deada single shot

"Is all that will be needed. should he charge, Why, there are two of us to face the foe." To which young John Crane quavered in
response:

"God help me, sir, but I ... I cannot go!"

Helen heard the words and laughed aloud.

"Don't mind him, dad," she cried,

"I'll come with you.

I'm not afraid of tigers, quick or dead,

Thank God that I am not a coward too."

Old Dring looked up at her and shook his head.

"That's well said, lass," he said,

'but it won't do!

You stay there in your tree till we come back.

Such things are not for women, leastways you!"

He swiftly turned on Crane

and frowned at him,

A savage, dark, forbidding frown, and said:

"I did not know that you were such a cur!

You are not fit to live!

You should be dead!"

Good Bali stepped into the widening breach:
“*Huzoor*,’ he said, “hard words

are no use here!

Crane sahib will come because his *will* is good.
Call him not coward, born in whom is fear.

“For who can struggle ’gainst God’s

great decree

And hope to conquer? No; we must just wait
Till He sees fit to cure the malady
And so release us from our evil state.”

Then Crane, with sobbing breath

and streaming brow,

Spoke to old Bali, and he said: “Lead on.

What matters it at all if I am killed?

The whole world will be glad

when I am gone!”

So Bali led the way along the trail;

An easy, rambling trail with lots of blood.

“The tiger cannot live,” he often said.

“He’s bleeding like a rivulet in flood.”

But yet the trail meandered on and on

Here had the tiger laid him down to rest

But, tortured by a swarm of following flies,

Had up and staggered on,

by death hard-pressed.

Cautiously, with every sense alert,
The trackers kept on so relentlessly,
Mile after mile they trailed, till Bali stopped
And, dumb with fear, pointed breathlessly.

The long, meandering trail had swept around
In a wide arc, and now 'twas plain to see
The tiger to the water had turned back,
And he was making straight for Helen's tree.

At once they cast their caution to the wind,
And forward sped with hurried, noisy tread.
They knew not what they'd
 find...perhaps 'twould be
The tiger and some beaters lying dead.

'Twas not for Helen Dring
they feared, for she
Had promised to remain in her *machan*.
'Twas for the beaters who around her sat,
Unconscious of the coming of Sher Khan.

So on they sped, till suddenly they stopped.
A sound they'd heard, a loud, distinct coo-ee!
'Twas followed by a string of angry grunts.
"Oh God," cried Dring,
 "it's Helen left her tree!"



Pad elephant

Photo S Jepson.

Down on one knee Dring dropped,
his rifle spoke;
In quick succession shot on shot he sent:
He might as well have tried to stop a hill
That was on some sad town's destruction bent.

But fifty yards divided them! The beast
Was moving fast, his blood-shot eyes on her.
One hundred yards from
them the others stood;
And young John Crane was paralysed by fear.

He alone had chance to save the girl;
The swiftest there on human feet that day;
Yet like a statue on those feet he stood,
Unable to advance or run away.

But suddenly from out the ether spoke
Crane's long-dead mother; urgently she cried:
'Go on, my son. Let no man ever say
That for your want of courage that girl died.'

Then that occurred which none
there thought could be—
Crane lifted high his rifle as he sped
On Hermes' heels across the glade to save
The girl whom all believed as good as dead

Now through the forest rang a great acclaim!
The beaters from tall trees

had watched the scene.

When bullets failed to stop

that charge of death.

Of what avail had their slim arrows been!

Down they slid and swarmed

around John Crane,

Saluting him and shouting out his praise;

Then, as he reeled from loss of blood,

they caught

And carried him away in a deep daze.

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THE scene is changed. The campfire's glare
With leaping radiance lights the tope;
Beyond its reach, in darkness, lies
John Crane, the man who reached his hope.

And to his bedside softly comes
Miss Helen Dring, to take his hand
In both her own; on neither one
She wears stoned ring or golden band.

"I thank you, John, for what you did,"

Says she. "Today you saved my life."

A coward born, my hero now!

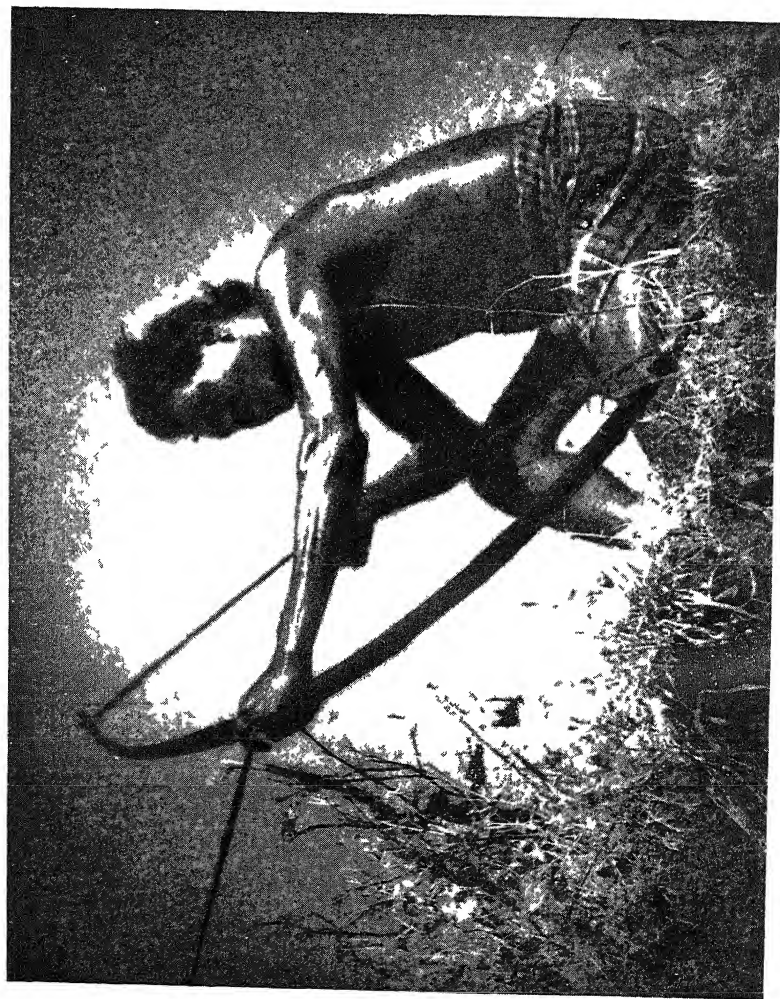
want, John Crane, to be your wife."

And John Crane sweetly smiles at her.
Though victor he, he is not proud.
He cannot now upbraid this girl
In accents grating, harsh or loud.

He will not lash with words that sting,
As she lashed him that very day.
For all the gall she's made him drink
He cannot ask her now to pay.

For to John Crane has come a love,
God-granted as his palm and prize,
A love so great it fills his heart
With kindness, joy and sheer surprise.

"I'm sorry, dear," he simply says,
"That which you ask can never be.
There's only one girl in this world
For me.....and Mary Martin she."



Bhl Archer

Photo S Jepsen

The Black Panther of Agajhirri

What fans the feeble glow of age,
Rekindling all its dormant fires,
Transforming sparks to leaping flame,
Revivifying age-killed desires?
Vengeance alone! the lust to rise and slay
That which threatens or has ta'en away
Something we love and cherish
more than life . . .
Religion, country, children, home or wife.

In sylvan glade, by sparkling spring,
Stood several little, rude, thatched huts,
Built by the aborigines
Whose habits run in age-old ruts.....
The Gonds, those simple dwellers in the wilds,
Born hunters, trackers, friendly savage folk
Whose clothes are loin-cloths,
and who always are
Prepared to have a drink and share a joke.

In Agajhirri he was born,
To manhood grew, to age declined,
Old Ookaria, the swarthy Gond,
Today so feeble, bent, half-blind.
By day he sat before his lowly door;
At night he slept upon his cowdung floor;
Save son and small grand-daughter he'd no one;
They were his world, his moon,
his stars, his sun.

The winter of his life he spent
In dreaming of the days of yore,
Of triumphs of a glorious past,
Gone and done with for evermore.
He dreamed and slept till, on a stormy night,
In keeping with whose horror, creeping came
A terror, which rekindled once again
In Ookaria a bright and vengeful flame.

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The red-hot blast of another day
Was cut short in its course
By the Storm God, as he urged along
His steaming ebon horse.
Behind him, in a grand array,
The lightning round its feet at play,
His great Armada rolling came
Through sheets and stabs of brilliant flame,
And thunder played the band.



Old Ookane

Photo S Jepson

The south-west wind, unleashed,
came leaping,
Driving in its van
A burning, blinding, cutting dust-cloud,
Red, and grey and tan;
Howling, whistling, shrieking, lashing,
Through the forest it went, smashing
Huts and trees which helpless stood
In its path, for nothing could
Withstand its frightful fury.

The groaning, over-laden heavens burst;
From pall as black as ink
They started to off-load their load
Upon the earth, their sink.
Hailstones came with hiss and clatter,
Then the rain in pouring patter;
Torrents, dry an hour ago,
Raged in muddy, swollen flow,
The monsoon had begun.

From noon till eve, with crash and flashing,
Poured earth-drenching rain,
Bringing promise of great plenty
From the fields of grain;
Evening changed to sodden night,

And through it, like an evil sprite,
Slinking came in search of prey,
A rarity on any day,
A big black panther.

Like a wraith, a flitting shadow,
From hut to hut it stole,
Quietly trying each door and window,
Searching for a hole
Through which to slip and seize its prey,
Then, quick as light, to dart away.
Through unlatched doorway in it went,
The night by howls and shrieks was rent,
And terror held stark sway.

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Dawn found the active Gonds astir;
They armed themselves with bow and spear;
But, though they searched with zeal and skill
Through forest dale and over hill,
No semblance of a trail found they;
The rain had washed it all away.
Their keen eyes even found no slightest trace,
And so the panther had a few days' grace.

When three nights passed it came again,
In blowing storm and drenching rain;
It moved along from door to door,
But found each one was made secure.

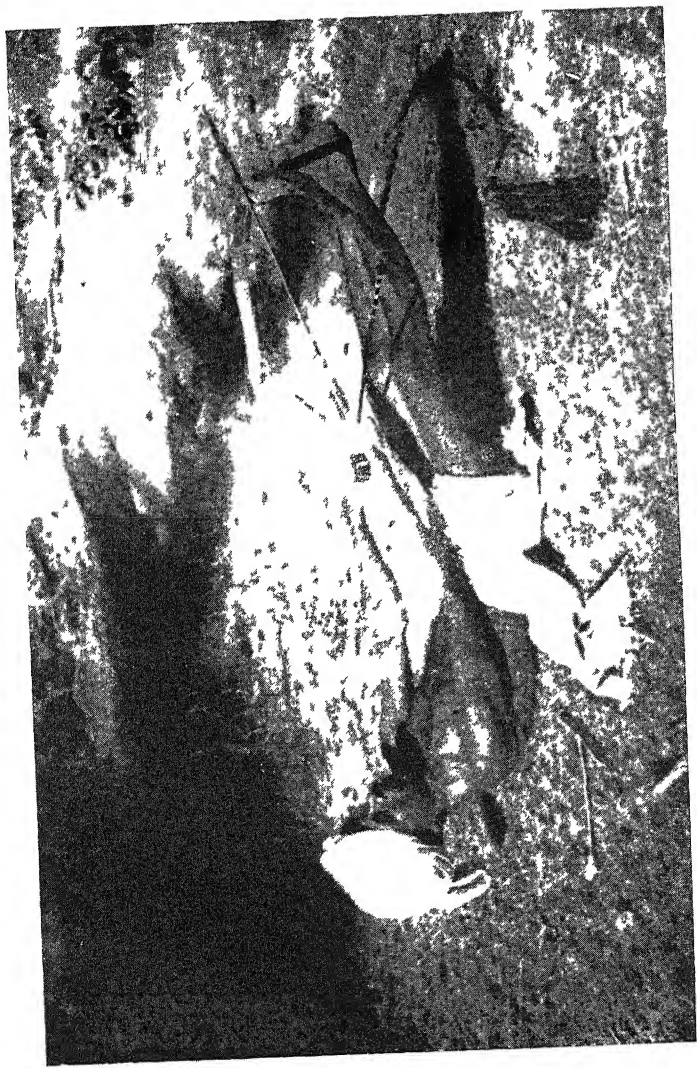


Photo S Jepson

Another method of shooting

So by the spring it lurking lay
To wait till someone came that way;
At dawn two girls came there to draw
Fresh water, and the score
went up one more.

And so, week after week, the rain,
Which filled the fields with growing grain,
Hid from the searchers' eyes the trail
Of the black terror of the vale,
While every week the terror took
One life or two by hook or crook.
Once, but just once! it walked into a trap.
And then it killed the setter with a slap!

The trap was set inside a hut,
The door of which was left unlatched,
While in the roof an armed man lay
Amongst the grass with which
'twas thatched.
A wick in oil-pan cast a ray
Upon a figure made of hay,
And from the hut which stood across the street
The doorway could be slammed,
then.....vengeance sweet!

At midnight, although never an eye
Had seen the panther slinking by,
The watchers neard a faint, low creak
And saw a narrow, glancing streak
Of light; then, with a vicious snap,
They jerked the door and closed the trap.
The snapshot taken by the hidden man
Just missed its mark, and then turmoil began!

The panther roared with might and main
And hurled itself about in vain;
It scratched and clawed and bit the door,
It leaped between the roof and floor,
It soon upset the pan of oil
And spilt the burning cotton coil
Upon the thing of cloth and hay,
About which flames began to play.

The room became a-reek with smoke,
Which caused the hidden man to choke;
The panther heard the sound and sprang,
And through the night a wild shriek rang,
A wide gap in the thatch appeared
And, by the beams which through it steered,
The watchers from the nuts beheld
The panther, in its jaws it held
The man who, but a trice before,
Had tried to stem its mounting score.



"His small grand-daughter"

Photo S Jepson

Old Age, which his vitality
and skill had so dispersed
That he was now unable

to go out and hunt, as he
Had done when from the aches

and pains his body had been free. But nothing kept the father back.

He took his bow and spear
And night and day he roamed the wilds
as he sought far and near.

For sixteen days he searched,
 and on the seventeenth he got
A fleeting glimpse of that dark shape,

but not a single shot
Could he put in before he felt

its hot breath in his face
And the smashing, heavy blow

which put a period to his race.
When others found his bow and spear

and knew that he was dead,
They brought the news to Ookaria,

who sadly shook his head
As, rising slowly to his feet,

 he shock clenched fists aloft
And swore an oath, at which no man
 of all that number scoffed:

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"What is left when those we loved
 Have joined the Great Majority,
 When life has nearly run its course
 And Age makes us an oddity,
 Sending us upon our way,
 Lonely, troubled, bent and grey?
 This Thing has stolen those I love,
 And now I swear, by God above,
 I'll make it pay the debt it owes,
 Or else my eyes too it shall close.
 Farewell, my friends. I leave you now, I go
 To sink the fangs of vengeance in the foe."

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The feeble old man turned into his hut,
 From whence he came again with rusted spear
 And light strong net of plaited fibre rope,
 Which twain composed his armaments and gear.

He did not take a bow and arrows for
 He could not see a dozen yards in front,
 So long before he'd time to string and draw
 The panther would be on him with a grunt.

Slowly the old man went upon his way,
 Stopped oft to rest, and, leaning on his spear,
 Called loudly to the gods in heaven above
 To stoop towards him and his prayers to hear

"Come out, you panther, come and fight!
You slinker in the dark of night!
You springer from the bough of tree!
Come out, come out, and fight with me!
Against young men you have prevailed,
For long this vale you have travailed;
When my two doves you stole and ate,
You sealed, fell monster, your own fate!
Come out, for nothing will avail!
Against me you shall *not* prevail.
Come out, you panther!

Come and try your strength
Against old Ookaria. You'll relent;
And ardently you'll wish you had not done
To death my small grand-daughter and my son."

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And so he sang and kept on singing as
He slowly turned about to look and stare.
The sun sank down towards his rest, and soon
The sky was flushed with Glory's gloriest flare.
Mixed gold and carmine decked
the earth's far rim,
Bright crimson streamers
quartered heaven's blue;
Wherever they came down and kissed the earth
They flooded it with true love's roseate hue.

But the old eyes of Ookaria had
No use for sunsets! They observed the east,
From which, when Sol began to sink to rest,
The full-moon would uprise, a silver feast.

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But twixt the death of sunlight
 and the moonbeams' silver spate
 Lies Dusk, the neutralizer, which
 'mongst shapes chaos creates;
 It fuses them, confuses them,
 they lose their entity,
 And none can pick them out
 with confidence or certainty.
 A-hiding in Dusk's murky shades
 the sable panther came
 To see who thus sat shouting out
 and calling it by name.
 On springy, yielding pads it came,
 nor ever made a sound
 As, stealthily and crouching low,
 it circled round and round.
 Its sable hue so blended with
 the smudgy, cloudy light,
 That it was safely hidden from
 the keenest human sight;
 Nor ever yet the slightest sound
 reached Ookaria's ears

It felt malignant, fiery stabs
 rush shooting through its paws,
 It started to blaspheme in loud,
 reverberating roars,
 It quite forgot the man and tried
 to ease its paining feet
 By pulling out these awful quills
 with its strong, useful teeth.
 It reared, it plunged, it rolled about,
 and worse became its plight,
 It crushed the plums whose oozing gum
 besmeared it left and right.
 It soon became a heaving, frenzied
 mass of grass and leaves;
 In rolling it collected quills
 both singly and in sheaves.
 To impotence it was reduced,
 in impotence it raged,
 So primitive the trap and yet
 so surely was it caged!

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Within six feet of it stood he
 Who'd set the trap so cleverly.
 Where active youth had tried and failed
 'The cunning or old age prevailed.

Slowly old Ookaria rose,
Stood leaning on his spear,
And cursed amain the creature which
Had stolen those to him so dear.

He said his say, and then, at last
About the panther deftly cast
His light rope net, and laughed as it
Savagely tore and clawed and bit.
From those entangling folds it tried
With frantic effort to break free;
The more it tried the tighter drew
The toils of its captivity.

Then Ookaria raised his spear,
In clarion tones, resounding, clear,
"Gods of my Fathers, thanks to thee,"
He cried, "that thou hast chosen me
To be the instrument of Death.
I lusted to destroy this pest,
And when my vengeance sweet is gained,
Gods of my Fathers, let me rest."

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With spear aloft, he fell upon the beast,
And drove the well-tried blade with savage force
Into its heart. A shudder through it ran;
It died with just a sigh of deep remorse.

And then the ancient's fires died down again.
He'd done the thing he set himself to do.
The gods of his forefathers heard his prayer,
And wrote *finis* against his long life too.

The villagers discovered him next day,
Quite dead, but leaning stiffly on his spear,
Whose blade was buried deep into the heart
Of *that* which through the vale
could spread no fear.

So passed old Ookaria, the dauntless Gond.
His spirit rides, on moonlit nights, I'm told,
Upon the big black panther which he slew.
In his own land his memory won't grow cold.

THE CHANDA TIGER

So pale the stars in fleckless sky,
For in its zenith rode the moon,
Whose silver radiance fell about
John Adamson, the young dragoon.

So still the air and scented sweet
With fragrance from the orange bloom;
Ah, who can tell what patterns now
Are forming in Fate's active loom.

Cupid has shot a tiny bolt;
In Adamson it finds a mark;
But yet he hesitates because
She might refuse: his fears are stark.

"Dear Mary, will you marry me?"
He says at last. "Far more than life
I love you, and for long I've yearned
To ask if you would be my wife."

Her long-lashed eyelids fluttered up
Revealing eyes of cornflower blue,
With which she took keen stock of him
E'er saying, "How shall I know that's true?"

"How can I tell that in the years,
When age has laid its hand on me,
You will not look upon me as
A stale and faded novelty?"

"I love you, dear," he simply says.
"My love is strong. It will not wane.
Test it in any way you wish,
You'll find no weak link in the chain."

His voice rang true and so sincere,
She knew he surely spoke the truth:
But something more she *had* to know,
And so she plucked forbidden fruit.

She kept her eyes upon his face,
The while her bosom fluttered fast.
"Bring me the Chanda tiger's pelt,"
She forced herself to say at last.

His arm about her stiffened hard,
The muscles of his jaws thrust out,
But yet he answered evenly,
"You know, of course, what you're about!

"You want that creature's stinking hide.
Without it you'll not marry me?"
She nodded dumbly, and he said:
"I'll bring it, then. So God help me."

She felt her heart contract with fear;
She felt her blood run cold as ice;
But yet could not recall her words.
Her tongue was held as in a vice.

She stopped him as he turned away.
"Kiss me," she begged, but he said, "No;
Not till I've brought the thing you want."
And, leaving her, he turned to go.

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The scene is changed. The Colonel sits
Behind his table of plain deal.
His face is hard, his thoughts are hard,
Because they *must be* hard as steel

"This tiger, Adamson," he says,
"Has slain a score or more of men.
The greatest hunters in the land
Have failed at it; and are you then

"Prepared to place your life in pawn
To get its wretched, mangy skin,
Because you think by doing so
Mary Carruthers' heart you'll win?

"My boy, a woman who can send
A man to death as she sends you——
I hate to say it, yet I must,
Because I feel it's very true——

"She is not worth it!" "Stop!"
Cried John. "I'd rather not discuss that, sir.
Give me the leave and let me go,
Or else my papers—they are here."

"Go, then!" the Colonel cried. "You fool!
Good luck to you. May you succeed.
I'll have the buglers out to sound
Last Post for you, e'er you proceed!"

But when John Adamson had gone,
The Colonel ceased his work to crave
A boon from Providence. He cried:
"God, bring him safely back. He's brave!"

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The scene is changed. A long, white road,
So populous and teeming once,
Lonely, in silent state now runs,
Deserted since there many months.

From Baranj through fair fields it runs,
Fields fallow now for none durst till;
Then on to old Tadali's huts,
Where, too, the tiger's made its kill.

And thence through jungle lands it runs
To Chanda town, where none dare go,
For on each mile of that long stretch
The monster's let the red blood flow.

For night and day no difference make,
Nor open field nor forest glade.
At any time, where'er it wills,
Its monstrous human meal is made.

No longer does the pilgrims' chant
The charm of moonlit nights adorn.
No longer are the brides and 'grooms
In bright processions on it borne.

The music of the saw and axe
Among the forest trees is stilled;
The ploughman's song, the gleaner's lay
Have left a void that can't be filled.

The road's grey dust lies undisturbed
By wheels of creaking country carts;
The *renghi*'s jingling, trotting bulls
Use other roads in other parts.

Only the postal runners run,
And they are few and far between,
For bold indeed is he who'll take
To Chanda letters of the Queen.

In days gone by they singly ran
With jingling bells and shouted song;
Today they run like wraiths in pairs,
A belt their only uniform.

No cheers now greet their passing through,
But only lamentation wild
As some poor village woman mourns
A loving husband or a child.

And ceaselessly the people pray:
"O Bhagwan, hear our prayers and send
Thy messenger, with lightning armed,
Our fear and misery to end."

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The scene is changed. Fair moonlight floods again
Both town and city, forest, field and plain;
And in the still of night the people hear
The postal runners' bells and loud refrain.

Doubting their own good ears, the Baranj folk
Their doors and windows open just a crack,
And in the distance see two figures come
Jog-trotting down that pale and fateful track.

Who can it be? they, wondering, ask themselves,
Who recklessly thus gamble with stern Death.
Bhagwan, their prayers, forgotten, they declare
Them fools whose lives will pay their folly's debt.

What song is it they sing? None seems to know.
But do *they* sing? A single voice is heard;
And as they nearer draw, the people start
At something which seems utterly absurd.

The one behind is human; that in front
A lifeless dummy hanging from a pole,
But with its realistic arms and legs
By several strings kept under good control.

It is John Adamson who staggers by,
Shouting out some wild and frenzied lay
Which, penetrating far, he hopes will draw
The tiger from its lair in search of prey.

His thews, from army exercises hard,
Withstand the strain of that strange burden he
Has slung by means of

leathern thongs and straps

In order that his hands might still be free.

Even in Phoebe's sickly sister's light
The broad white road seems dazzling to the eye;
Its marge of straggling bushes throw no shade,
Yet in them may a lurking killer lie.

It seems as if all Nature holds its breath
To watch the outcome of this epic fray,
The leaves hang tense and still; no puffs of wind
Among the sered grasses rustling play.

Regardless of this state, John Adamson
Goes reeling on, and now the people hear
His voice in old Tadali's lowly huts,
And peep out too, but greater is their fear.



Beaters going to take post

Photo S Jepson

For here begins the lonely jungle stretch
In which the dreaded killer has its lair—
No fixed abode, or it were long since dead,
But here and there; in fact, it's anywhere.

As through this hamlet shouting goes the man
Who dices with stern Death because he must,
The Christian preacher joins his hands and says:
"From dust he sprang, he now returns to dust."

John Adamson's quick eyes detect the change.
The road is now with shadows overlaid,
Black patches large and small,
some clearly etched,
Some merging in the jungle's deeper shade.

Each sense alert, he runs with caution now,
For he has crossed the threshold of Death's door;
At any moment that grim spectre might
Attack him swiftly from the forest floor.

Great horror fills Tadali's people, for
The Indian peasant's heart is good and kind;
But e'er they close their doors they see a shape
That follows Adamson, but far behind.

Bright eyes a pock-marked face,
torn khaki shorts,
An old green coat, frayed puttees police-blue—
Raja *shikari*, friend of every man.
Him, at least, the startled people knew.

“Who was it, then, who passed?”
they ask of him,
“And will he kill the tiger, do you think?”
“Some Captain from the Nagpur fort,” says he,
“Who’s mad with love of woman,
or with drink.

“How can I say if he will kill the brute?
I’m not Bhagwan, with knowledge so profound.
What chance has he? You know as well as I
There’s only one, and then it isn’t sound.

“Which will the tiger take?—it lies in that!
The thing in front or him of woman born?
You know the answer. Farewell, now, I go.
The issue will be settled e’er the dawn.”

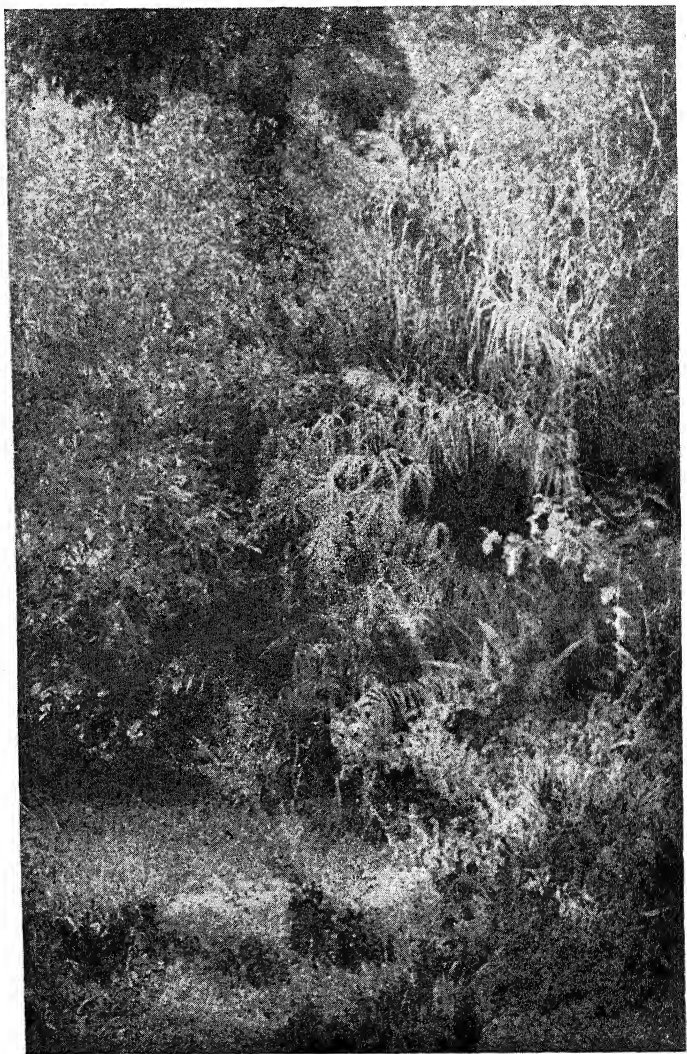
And off he lopes, intrepid, short and thin.
His naked feet the faintest patter make.
His greatest urge—the conflict he must see.
His greatest hope—that he will get a break.

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"For many days no man has come his way"

Photo: S. Jepson.

The scene is changed: The bright hot afternoon
Will soon be overcome by silver night;
But beauty to the tiger and the stag
Means nothing if it does not ease their plight.

The flies will go with sunset, but the heat
Will stay, and be the more oppressive, for
There's nothing quite so bad
as breathless night,
With hordes of stinging things
that make one sore.

With these hard thoughts,
the tiger leaves the couch
He wrested from a hyena in the morn,
And makes his way with sluggish,
noiseless tread
To where a tiny spring does yet adorn

A barren nallah bank with flecks of green.
The luke-warm water's not refreshing, yet
He drinks it. then a careful toilet makes,
And thinks upon his state with deep regret.

For many days no man has come his way.
The postal-runner's bells, the carter's song,
The woodsman's thudding axe and singing saw
Are memories of the past—an age now gone.

He has a kill, of course, a sambhar stag,
With which the pangs of hunger to assault.
But sambhar flesh is stringy. He prefers
The flesh of man, soft, succulent and salt.

He hears a clicking sound – a big boar's hoofs.
Fat sows are good to eat,

but boars show fight.

It's time to go. He has no wish to face
The slashing tusks and determined might.

A light, quick leap conveys him to the bank,
A grunt, a rush, a rattle, stabbing pain—
A porcupine departs at furious speed.
Caught napping once, it won't be caught again.

The tiger pulls the quill out with his teeth,
And licks his injured side and slinks away,
Lashing his tail in rage. His mood bodes ill
For those who chance to cross

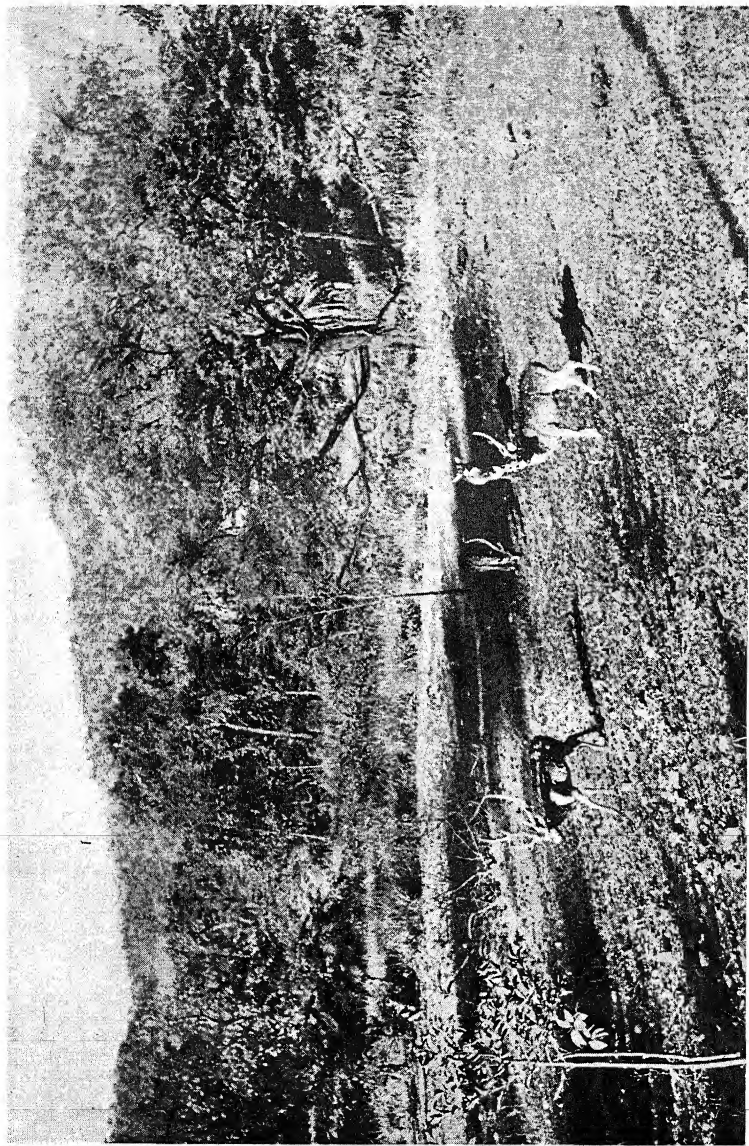
his path this day

His wound, the heat, his

longing for man's flesh,

Distress him, and he grumbles his complaint
In deep, harsh, awful, grating accents which
Have chilled alike the blood

of brave and faint.



Cheetal (spotted deer) at home.

Photo: S. Jepsom.

And then he hears the bells and shouted lay!
Faintly he hears them—faint and far away—
And just as Jessie knew the Pibroch's drone,
He knows those sounds are
made by man alone.

He swiftly turns. To lose a second's space
May mean a good meal lost, a lengthy chase;
And chasing in this grim, offensive heat! —
"I'll hurry now," he thinks, "and save my feet."

The lizard and the mongoose see him pass,
Huge, silent, swift: they do not say, "Alas!
That poor man's number's up!"

In Nature's lore

There's mate, menace and
meal—and nothing more!

As louder through the Vale of Bones the song
Its challenge ringing sends,
"Come, come along!"

The tiger knows the hour of fate is nigh;
The man knows nothing, but his hopes are high.

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*The skulking monster's reached the fatal Road,
And sees a little culvert, gleaming white;
Its parapet a long, dark shadow throws—
An all-concealing shadow black as night.*

No eye could penetrate this vantage coign,
Although a nose might give the game away.
The wind was right: with nothing now to fear,
Still as a log the crouching monster lay.

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The stage is set. The killer waits.
The jungle holds its breath.
In Fate's great loom the pattern now
Reveals the spectre, Death.
John Adamson comes reeling on.
His voice is not so loud;
His muscles crack beneath the strain,
But yet his mein is proud.
Head up despite the beads of sweat
That trickle down his face,
He tries to search each shadow patch
To get a moment's grace
Before is made the spring of death,
Before is struck the blow
That paves the way for yellow fangs
To let the red blood flow;
He sees the culvert from afar.
His muscles shriek for rest.
He thinks he'll sit there for a while,
Perhaps it would be best.

Five hundred yards divide the twain,
The tiger, wriggling, sets
Its great hindquarters for the pounce
And very slowly lets
The striking paw uprise to deal
The powerful, smashing blow
That snaps a victim's neck and lays
The twitching carcase low.

A hundred yards divide them now;
The tiger, seeing two men,
Decides to take the one behind;
And if the front one then
Should chance to stop and turn around
To help his comrade, he
Will also pay, with death, the price
Of his temerity.

And now the gap is fifty yards.
Old Raja, far behind,
Has seen the gleaming culvert too,
But never to *his mind*
Occurred the thought or resting there!
Far rather would he be
Ensconced among the branches of
Some tall and stalwart tree!

He sees the moonlight glinting on
The Captain's bells and spear.
He does not know the climax of
The drama is so near.

THEY MEET. John Adamson has reached
The culvert and swings round
The dummy figure, e'er he sits,
To lay it on the ground.
The tiger, waiting till they pass,
Is suddenly surprised
To find a man right o'er its head!
Its self-control, well-tried,
Was never proof against *this* shock!
It thinks its life's at stake,
And with an angry roar it springs
That tooth and claw might take
Their swift and dreadful toll. It lands—
Can tiger miss its leap?—
And down they come upon the Road,
A struggling, dusty heap.

The bamboo snaps beneath the strain.
So sudden is the shock,
The Captain's hurled against the bridge
And feels his senses rock.
Half-dizzy from the violent jolt,
He sees, six feet away,

The tiger mauling savagely
His man of cloth and hay.
He knows that every second counts;
That soon the monstrous brute
About the thing it bites and tears
Will realise the truth.

Up flashed his pistol hand to shoot,
That move the tiger saw
And, whipping round to spring on him,
It placed its big front paw
Upon the spear and bunch of bells
John Adamson had dropped.
The spear sank deep into its pad,
The angry tiger stopped
And savagely it bit the haft.
The moment was its last.
The Captain fired. The heavy ball
Into its brain-pan passed.
Another shot he gave it, but
Of that there was no need.
"So help me, God," he'd said, and God
Had aided him indeed.
The monster's roars were clipped off short;
Now silence reigned supreme,
And Adamson stood staring down
As though 'twere all a dream.

Great Bhagwan, of the villagers,
Had not betrayed their trust.
His messenger, with lightning armed,
He had not turned to dust.

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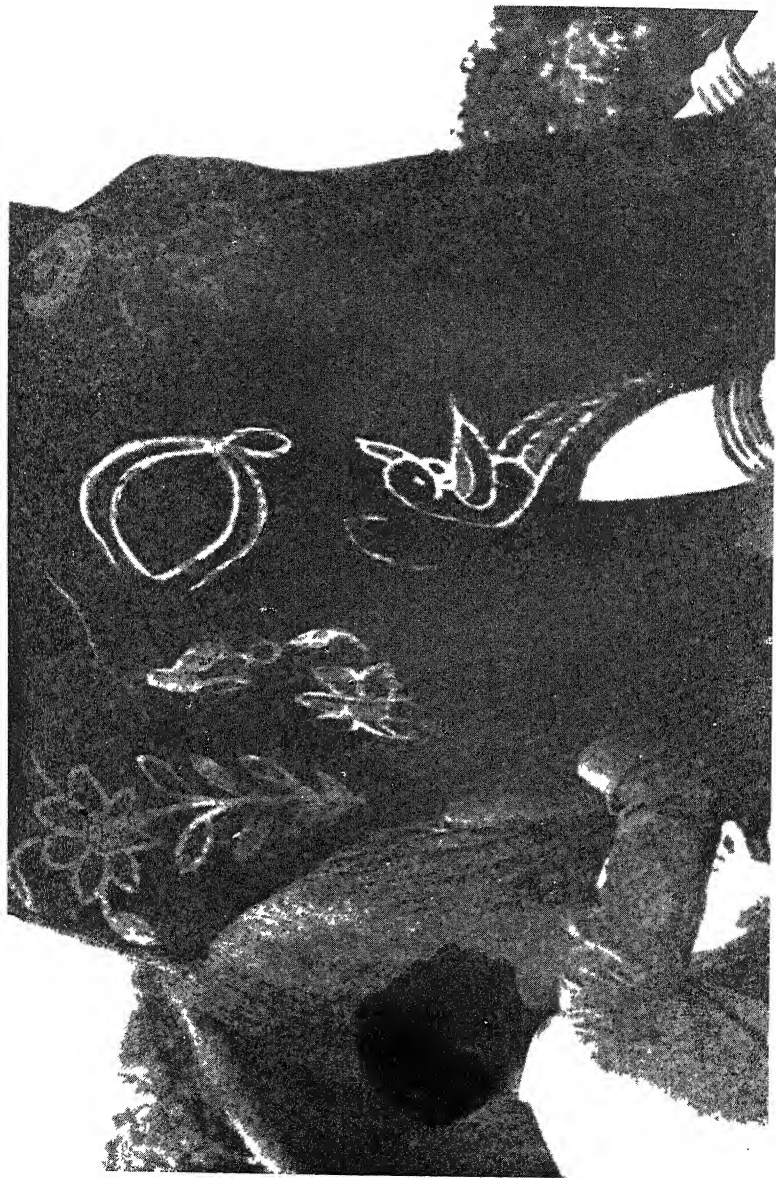
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The scene is changed. Upon the culvert sits
John Adamson; his feet are very sore
From miles of bare-foot running. He has doffed
The harness which a while before he wore.

He feels no great elation at his deed.
His thoughts, in fact, are very far away.
"Why did she send me on this quest?" he asks.
But there is none to answer him this day.

She must have had some reason very sound:
He won't concede that it was vanity.
"I'll ask her when we meet again," he says,
"And truthfully I know she'll answer me."

His thoughts from these far wanderings return,
Brought back to earth by feel of Raja's head
Laid on his feet, by sound of Ra'ia's voice
Exclaiming "*Sahib, Sahib BAHADUR,*
it is dead!"



Decorated elephant

Photo S. J. J. J.

They strewed the road with marigolds
and leaves;
Brought jasmine garlands more than he
could wear;
And every village mother told her son:
"A hero comes. Like him, too, do and dare!"

The railhead at Warora hung its head.
'Twas interested when the Captain came,
But laughed and shouted when, the harness made
He practised, with the dummy, his grim game.

Warora knew that Englishmen were mad,
But this one was the limit—very daft!
Go out against the tiger with that thing!
They slapped each other's backs and
laughed and laughed.

But now they had a decorated train,
Held up beyond its time to start away,
If Adamson would deign to go by it,
An emperor's privilege must be his today.

His drab compartment to a state-room turned,
And next to it the pelt was well displayed,
With Raja there to keep it company
And tell the tale of how its debt was paid.

At every little station people came
With gifts for him who'd done the gallant deed,
And heard the tale, embellished now with frills,
Of how the country was from terror freed.

At last Nagpur! Here is no sound of Posts --
The First or Last—the bugles do not sound,
But the great guns from Sitabaldi Fort
Crash in salute, voluminous round on round.

The Colonel, smiling broadly, meets the train,
The Officers a guard-of-honour form;
The throats of soldier and civilian raise
A cheer that rises like a tropic storm.

To press reporters Adamson declares
He's sick of all the fuss. He'd rather be
Having a good hot bath and going to bed
Instead of being pranced round triumphantly.

But then, the citizens of Nagpur wish
To see and meet him. Brooking no delay,
They've planned a moonlight dance and party at
The Telenkeri gardens for today.

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And so it chanced that in that orange grove
In which they'd parted six days since, the moon
Smiled once again, and shed her silver light,
On Mary and the gallant young dragon.

She stood before him as a prisoner stands
Before the bar of justice, waiting for
The words which will return him to the world
Or shut him in behind the prison door.

A simple frock of virgin white she wore,
Her face was pale, her blue eyes steady still,
Her girlish bosom rose and fell and rose,
Her presence seemed to sap his granite will.

He wanted her, this woman, for his own.
"Come, take the cash in hand!" his ardour cried.
His better judgment answered, "Wait a bit!
Ask her the question first, and *then* decide."

He spoke at last; his voice was gruff and low,
Strong passion warred in him against restraint.
"Why did you send me on that quest?" he asked.
She answered him with pitiful complaint:

"Once in our family a coward was,
And now that wretched taint has shown in me,
So I can only marry one who's brave,
My children must not also cowards be.

"I didn't mean to send you on that quest.
I love you, and I only wished to know
What mettle you were made of. I'd have been
Content to know you had the heart to go.

"I tried to stop you, but I was too late.
I should have died if you, too, had been killed."
He stooped and took her in his arms, and lo!
His cup of happiness was filled.

The Retaming of Maung Gale

Maung in Burmese means Mister, and Gale (pronounce ga-lay) small. Curiously enough, Maung Gale means "The Emperor."

From calculated effort there could never
spring a deed

To equal those which have been done in
stress of moment's need,

For when the blood is hot men do that which,
when cooler, they

Would dub as very madness, and from which
they'd turn away.

Such was the deed in Burma done these many
years ago

By Bertram Jones, who roamed the wilds
while sun was high or low.

By day he measured logs of teak, some great
and others small,

At evening, with his dog and gun, obeyed
the hunter's call;

A quiet man who high his voice in anger
never raised,

A man whom, for his love of men, full loudly
others praised,
But one who no one ever thought would do
so great a deed
That for its telling there would be of minstrel
any need.
But teak, unpolished, lacks appeal; I would
that now were sent
A better bard to tell how he against an elephant,
A creature maddened by the *musth*, the lust
for human life,
His brain and muscle matched so well in
short and glorious strife.

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When all the forest round was dry
And bare of teak and bamboo leaf,
In hollow formed by seven small hills
There stayed a little emerald sheaf
Of grass, and through it trickling ran
The waters of Kathet-pin-zan.

And to this hollow, when his work
Of hauling logs of teak was done,
Old Maung Gale, the elephant,
Would come, to bask there in the sun
As, with his trunk, in sweet content,
He o'er him cooling showers sent.

More tame and docile friend of man
Than Maung Gale 'twere hard to find;
In all the Timber Range he was
The very finest of his kind.
A child could handle him when he
Was living in sweet sanity.

But when the madness of the *musth*
Was on him and he raged at will,
No friend had he, and only man
He sought to trample, gore and kill.
Of death the true epitome
Was Maung Gale in insanity!

From dawn till dawn he sought for man
So harshly and relentlessly,
Driving him from hearth and home
To live in trees, a refugee;
And those sad victims to his lust
He smashed and trampled in the dust.

This spell of *musth* was worse than all
That he had ever had before;
With death of ten it was not quenched.
He thirsted madly for more gore.
Whole villages he crushed in rage
As he went on his dread rampage.

Men strove to trap and bind the brute,
But all their efforts were in vain;
No trap would hold mad Maung Gale,
No rope could stand his muscles' strain.
An avalanche of terror, he
Went on his way quite recklessly.

To Jones and Clinton fell the task
Of stemming his mad blood-career,
And so they came to where he raged
And brought with them a curious gear.....
A hook, two-pronged, a light steel rope,
And in their simple hearts a hope !

With eyes sharp-skinned, each sense alert,
And feet light-shod for instant flight,
They travelled fast until they came
To Kathet-pin-zan in the night;
And there they heard the screams which chill
The blood and make the heart stand still.

The elephant soon found them out
And plagued them by both night and day.
And hard indeed they had to work
To live and keep out of his way.
He tried his level best to fix
One for the boatman of the Styx

Their plan was this..... beside the spring
The hook and rope of steel to lay,
Then hitch the rope to some light log
Which, lying loose, would have free play;
The cable, being unstrained, would hold
Through Maung Gale's struggles, wild, untold.

When Maung Gale was at his bath
Someone would have to go and shove
The hook about his leg, then run
Faster than flights the gentle dove.
That done, the contest would be o'er
For Maung Gale could charge no more.

But who would risk his life to go
And plant that hook? No man would dare!
If Maung Gale turned round too soon
At Death he'd not have time to stare!
In less than second's fleeting space
Of life in him there'd be no trace.

The offer of a large reward
For many days left all men cold;
Until at last a young Karen
Came forward, with his father old.
The pair with elephants were skilled,
Many they'd caught and many killed.

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A bargain, though, they stopped to make.
"Thakin, this job we'll undertake
If you your faithful promise give
That you will shoot to let us live.
If Maung Gale should turn to charge
When he is yet untrapped, at large,
With heavy rifles both of you
Must shoot to kill, and shoot quite true;
What other chance have we of life
If he should baulk us in the strife?
We're fleet of foot, but not so fleet
As Maung Gale on maddened feet!"

So Jones and Clinton promised they
Would wait with rifles on that day,
And if the direst need arose
With death the beast's career would close.

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The scene is changed. The light of afternoon
Fills all the hollow with a mellow glare,
And on the little hills surrounding it
Hide men in couples, everywhere a pair.

From mouth of pass between two little hills
A path lies cleared of things that crackle, and
The cable and the hook are well concealed
Beneath a cover of light dust and sand.

Above the path sit Jones and Clinton; they
Are armed with heavy rifles and a score
Of shells which, if they hit, will blow to bits
And shatter Maung Gale's head for evermore.

Beside them, crouching, squats the old Karen:
The scheme was his; he planned it, with his son
To play the hero's part and win great fame,
Reward and honour when the deed was done.

Beside him sits the lad, an active youth,
His skin a dark and glossy golden-brown;
He wears no extra cloth to hinder him
Should Death upon him chance to turn and frown.

And over all the deepest silence lies;
No sound or movement is there to betray
Their presence, and the air being calm and still,
The monster will not scent them on this day.

He comes! With rhythmic tread and gentle lurch,
Slow flap his giant ears like leather sails,
His long white tusks are stained with human gore,
Before his wicked eyes a stout heart quails.

Along the path, with mighty head anod,
He walks and stops beside
the clear, bright spring;

Then, after shackling Maung Gale's feet,
 he rose and slapped his rump
Saying: Off you go, old chap, to feed,
 and keep right off the hump!"

* * * *

That's all the tale of Jones's deed
 -and how he diced with death;
A more courageous one I have
 to see or hear of yet: .
On spur of moment it was done,
 and glory great it brought—
A glory all the greater for
 it never had been sought,

The Jungle's Night Parade

A bund of gravel man had made to hold
A little water in the months of heat,
A further muddy shore of grass and reeds
That formed the red-brown
whistling teal's retreat;

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Beyond, a little sea of yellowing grass
From which two flat-topped
ber-fruit trees arose,
And then the jungle's mighty wall of green,
So silent in the windless eve's repose.

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Thus was the lake that served the six rude huts
In which Adari's sons and daughters dwelt—
Those sturdy Gonds, who knew but little change,
By whom the want of time was never felt:

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Thus was the lake when, on a Christmas eve,
With blanket and binoculars, Ralph Slade
Climbed from the bund into a *kusum's* boughs
To watch the jungle's varied night parade.

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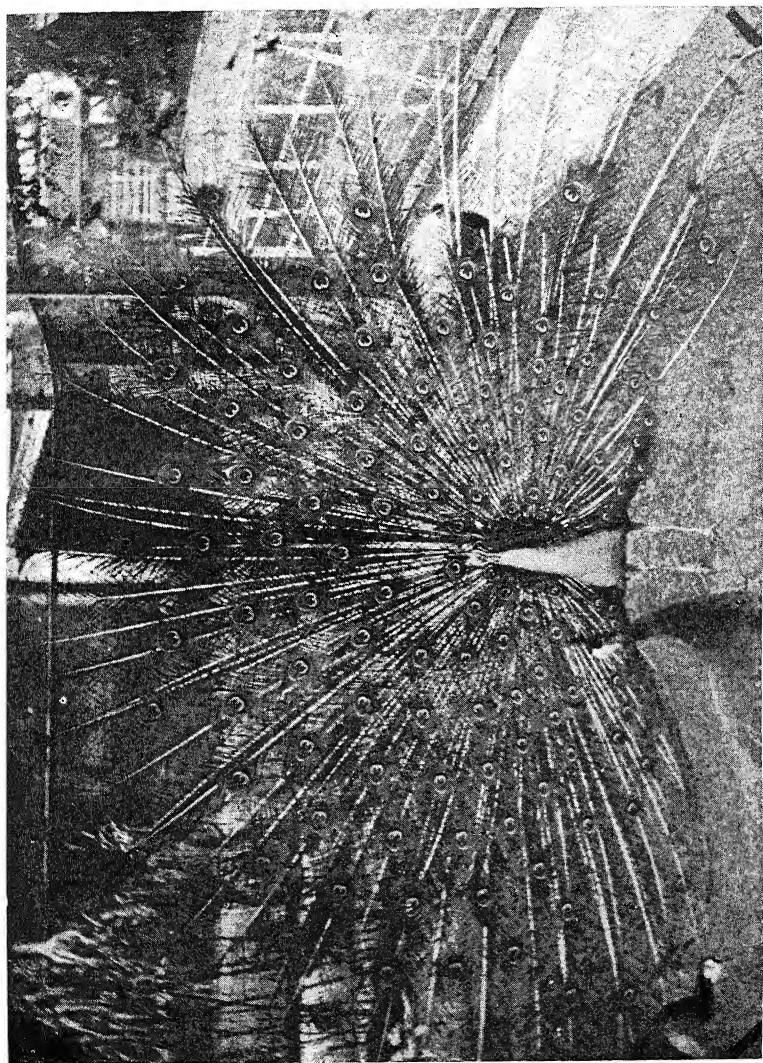


Photo: S. Jepson.

Dancing peacock

So thought Ralph Slade as in the twilight's wake
A jungle cock, like royal herald clad,
Came striding through the grass to seize the girl.
Ralph clapped his hands and called,

"She's gone, I'm glad!"

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Round whirled the cock,
his head and tail went down,
And back into the grass he shot amain,
Foregoing his drink, for he who saves his life
Will have a chance to come and drink again.

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An unseen beetle rose in droning flight;
Somewhere a jackal raised its mournful cry;
Dusk's mantle wrapped the earth in shade below,
While Venus flamed, a silver splash, on high.

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Slow rose the moon, and through the veil of dust
That hung translucent in the quiet air,
She glowed, a blood-red disc, but larger far
Than Phoebe when the death of day is near.

* * *

And who, on seeing her thus, would dare to dream
That in a while those hot, internal fires,
By dust created, would to dust return,
As does our mortal clay when life expires.

* * *

With knightly grace, behind his harem came
A sambhar stag, well-antlered head aloft,
To seek as well the aid of mud against
The ticks that clustered where his hide was soft.

* * *

So in he walked, and as his slender legs
Sank deep, he pulled them out with loud reports,
Resembling much the rifle cracks of those
Who shoot o'er water,
and who *think* they're sports!

* * *

A movement on the bund:

Ralph Slade looked round,
A porcupine had stopped to sniff and scratch
E'er hurrying down, a queerly rustling sheaf,
To stop upon a hard and stony patch

* * *

And sip, and sip, and sip, and sip and sip.
The sambhar wandered off, the pig went too,
But still that porcupine crouched, sipping on;
It seemed as though it *never* would be through.

* * *

A while it stopped to take brief stock of one
Of whom the moonlight made a flitting wraith—
A yellow jungle cat that seemed to have
In water's cleansing properties no faith

* * *

To quench its thirst seemed

but an after-thought:

It firstly sought to keep its fore-paws dry,

So placed them carefully upon a stone,

Lapped quickly and slunk off. A *cheetal's* cry

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Cut sharply through the night, a startled coo.

The porcupine jinked round,

froze stiff and stared.

Then flashed about and vanished with a rush.

A well-armed creature, well and truly scared.

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Ralph Slade looked down.

Beneath him something moved.

And from the shadows slipped into the light

A great striped head, huge shoulders in a crouch.

A tiger! Jungleland's most thrilling sight.

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Lapping its fill it quietly drew back,

Followed by eager human eyes that yearned

For yet another glimpse, and when that came

It brought no thrill, but disappointment burned.

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'Twas nothing but an old hyena which

The kindly moon had thus transformed, and Slade

Longed for a stone to fling at it and her

The mangy coward and gross, lying jade!

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But Luna, riding high, made quick amends
And sent a troop of graceful spotted deer,
Lithe, lovely creatures, lightly honey-browed
And dusted with the snowdrop's purest tears.

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Behind the hinds and

gambolling fawns two stags
Came slowly on, their slender horns a-nod;
They seemed so delicate, yet men have rued
Their furious charge, their savage toss and prod.

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They liked not mud, these Squires of the wilds,
So gathered at a sandy spot to drink,
And through them came

a little four-horned deer,
 That pigmy, mammoth-voiced,
with many a kink.

* * *

Few have not seen in real life or else
Upon the screen, how sheep

will stamp their feet
In an endeavour to persuade a dog
To have a care and beat a quick retreat.

* * *

These futile tactics, too, the four-horned deer
Will use at times, but when its courage fails,



‘ Save a haunting sense of beauty ’

Photo S. JEPSON

The Soul of India

*(These Verses were specially written to form a commentary for a
16 mm cine film made by Mr. Stanley Jepson The metric was
varied in order to suit the timing of the different shots)*

Part I: The Search

One night as I lay a-sleeping,
By gentle sea breeze fanned,
I thought the Soul of India came
To me from this ancient land.

When morning dawned, that vision,
Surpassing sweet and fair,
Had gone completely from my mind
And left no detail there

Save a haunting sense of beauty
That called me night and day,
To find the Soul of Ind and tell
The great world where it lay.

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I searched the streets of her cities
Where roar the electric cars;
I searched among the throngs that crowd
Her picturesque bazaars.

But who finds aught but bustle
Where business has a hold;
Where those of means rub shoulders with
The hungry and the cold?

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The annals of the country
Of mighty empires tell;
Enshrined in wealth I thought perhaps
The Soul of Ind must dwell.

I saw her rulers' palaces,
Their mansions by the sea,
And met the men who still uphold
Her ancient chivalry.

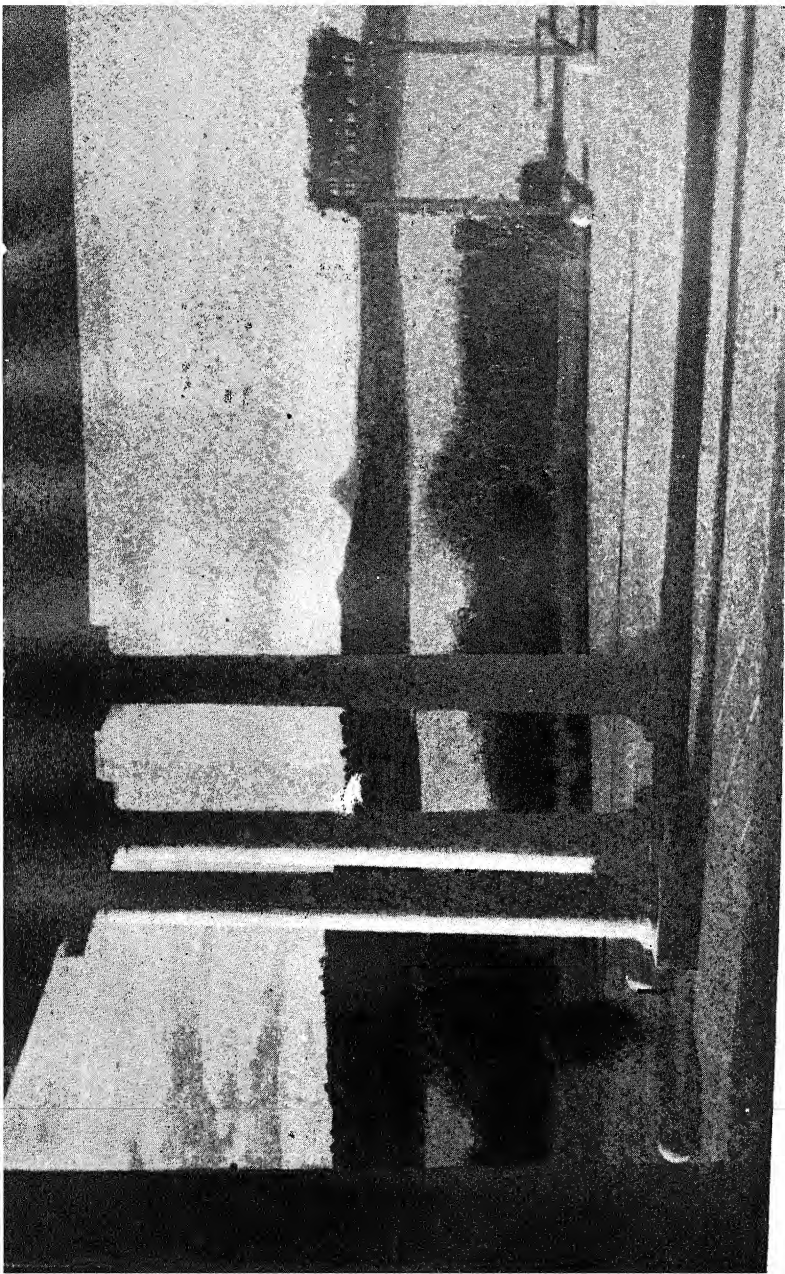
I saw her splendid dwellings,
Built in the latest mode,
By doctors, merchants, men of law,
Who'd found life's gilded road.

But in park and pleasure garden,
In pillared durbar hall,
I could not find the answer to
That deep, that stirring call.

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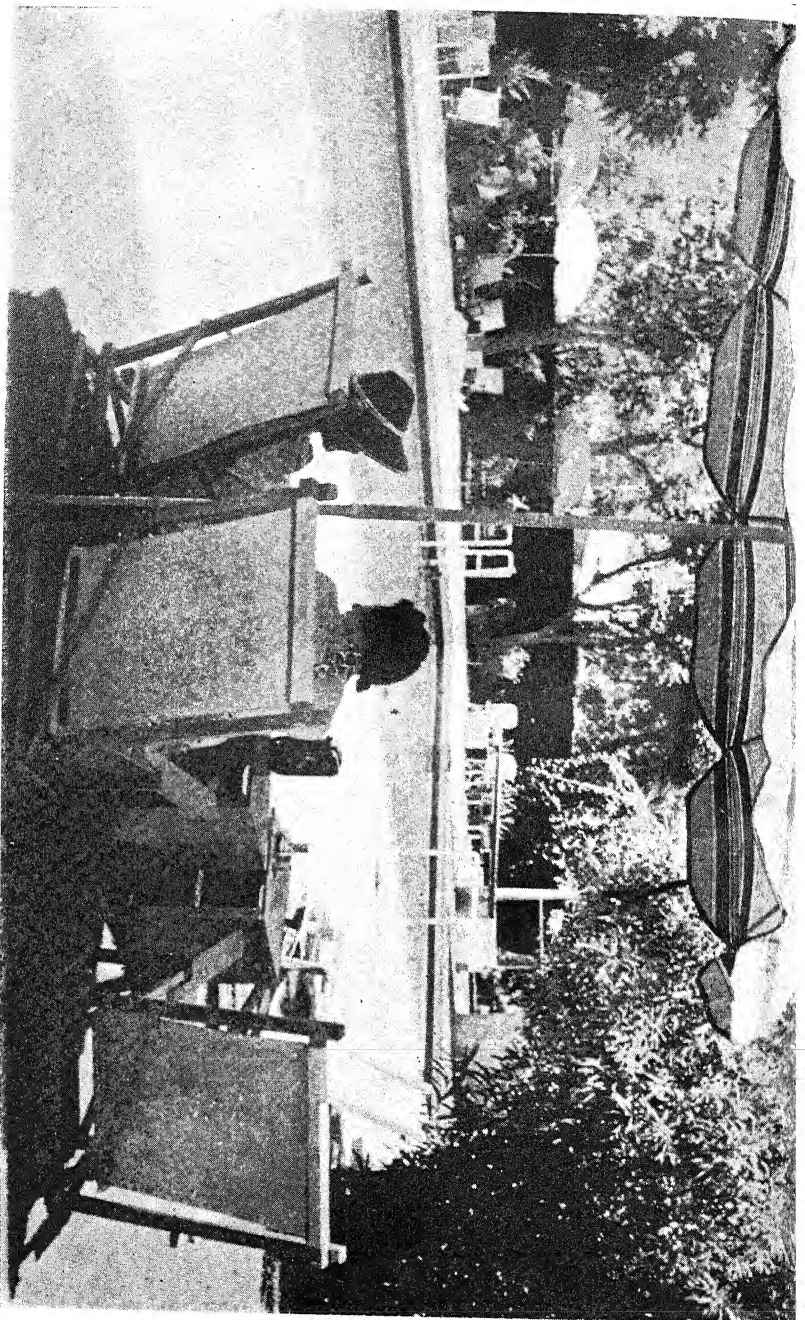
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" In pillared durbar hall "

Photo: S. JEPSON



"Where wealth and fashion meet"

Photo: S. JEPSON

So I turned to the rich man's playgrounds,
The many sports of kings,
And watched the blood-stock horses,
Whose hooves turn into wings.
I watched them race for their patrons,
Heard exhortation's cry,
Saw triumph in some faces,
In others saw hope die.

I went to those gathering places
Where wealth and fashion meet,
Where every kind of sport and play
Beguile the tedium of a day,
Where softest silks and jewels shine
While gentlefolk to music dine,
And where Narcissus might be prone
To look not at himself alone.

But even here, where much is done
For India quite informally,
I did not find her soul, and turned
To search the ever-restless sea,
Upon whose sparkling, fractious breast,
Their dainty white sails spread,
The scudding yachts, in passing, cried,
"Go, seek elsewhere instead.

“Seek where the thousands gather
To cheer the batsman’s feat,
Or groan or clap when bowling skill
Obliges his retreat.

“Seek in the great sports stadia,
Which princes help to build,
And where, by teams they patronise,
The multitudes are thrilled.

“Where men and women, fashioned
In athletics perfect mould,
For simple laurels strive as strove
The Greeks in days of old ”

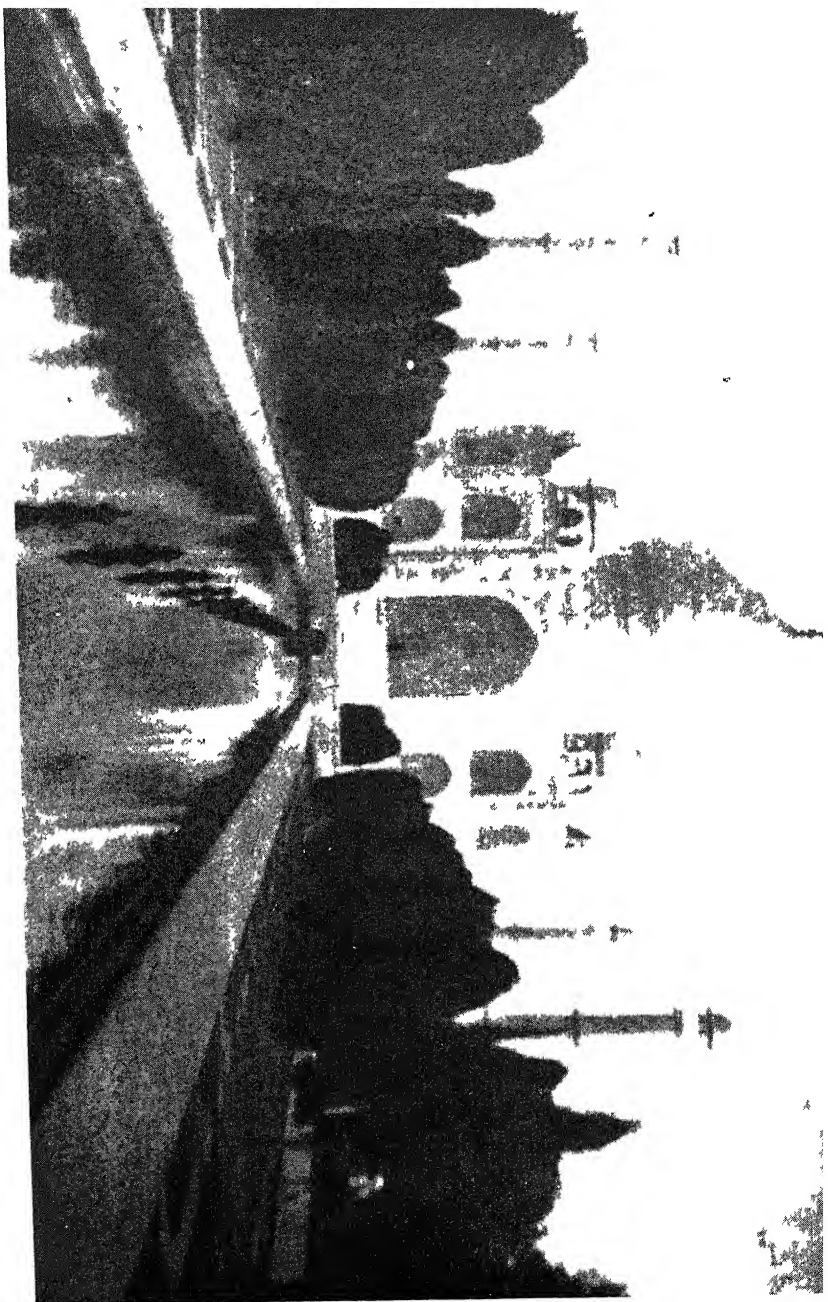
I went, I searched, but only found
A better brotherhood of men,
A better spirit growing up, .
But not the Soul of India. Then

I turned to seek where Time had left
Its mark indelible upon the land;
Where great memorials had been raised,
Each fashioned by an artist’s hand.



"Their dainty white sails spread"

Photo: S. JEPSON



“Marble mausoleum, lovely, long-lasting”

Photo S JEPSON

Could Nature hold the secret
In valley, hill or plain?
Could Malabar's fair inlets
Hide what I'd sought in vain?

O great, mysterious jungle
Hast thou the secret then?
And do thy creatures guard it
And keep it safe from men?

When sharpened instincts warn them
Of man's approach, they seek
Asylum in the verdure
Which shelters strong and weak,

And the scrawny vulture wheeling
Beyond the range of sight,
Comes down to do its scavenging
E'er falls the veil of night.

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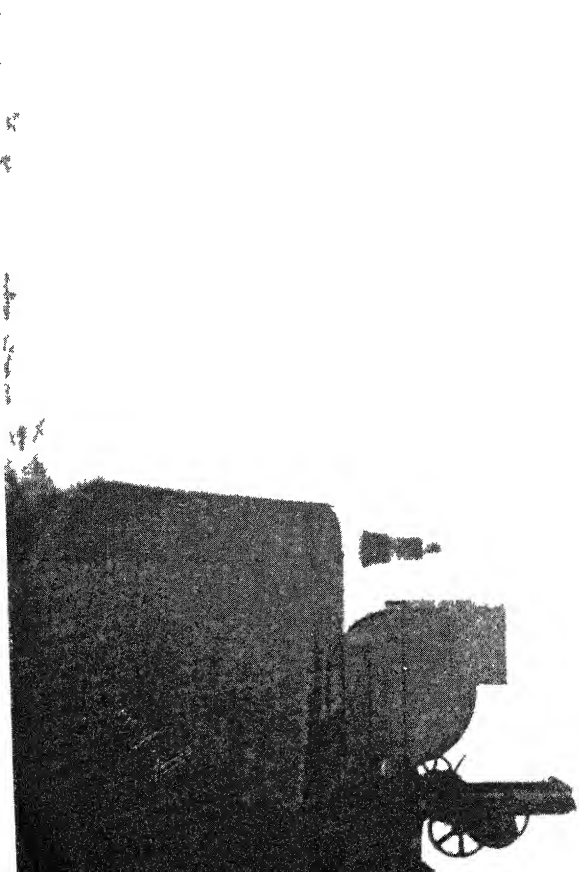
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Leaving the peaceful jungle,
I returned to the haunts of men,
To search where the streams of commerce flow,
Where the ships of the nations come and go,
Where liners linking the human race
In their distant voyaging pause a space;
Where the giant crane, so solid and staid,
Lifts the country's life-blood—goods of trade—



Where the dhows of the Arabs go down to sea"

Photo S JEPSON



Aboard some cargo boat e're they
Are carried to peoples far away;
Where the dhows of the arabs go down to sea
As they went in a distant century.
But not even here, where the men of the brine
Tell tales of the world, did this quest of mine
Discover a clue, so I turned to see
The Lords of the Land and their pageantry,

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I saw the lance-points gleaming,
The panoply of state,
The colourful attendants
Who ride beside the great.

I heard the people clapping
As along an emerald lawn
The Governor of a province
In his open coach was drawn.

But India's soul? It wasn't there.....
The Round Rupee held sway,
With everyone agog to see
Who'd win and what he'd pay.

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And then, in Indian India,
In regal trappings bright,
Great elephants of state came on,
A most impressive sight.

A Maharaja's people
Had gathered by the way
To acclaim a southland princess
Upon her wedding day.

As thousands gave her greeting
I thought I saw a clue,
And turned to Ind's old festivals
To see if it was true.

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It seemed to be at Holi,
When whoopee's all the rage,
And everywhere and anywhere
Is just a dancing stage.

When young men's fancies turn to
Large pots of liquid paint,
And girls, too, like a dousing,
But with some more restraint.

I thought perhaps the *Id* would
Produce a better clue;
But when at prayer the Faithful
Lack time for me and you.



"O man of ash and bowl"

Photo S. JEPSON

I made appeal to Ganpati,
The God of Luck. Said he:
"I'm always trailing fortune's spoor,
To help the rich, to help the poor;
And then, by all these people kind
I'm feted, in procession lined,
And thrown into the sea.
For *your* quest, then, I'm up a pole!
I have no time to hunt the Soul!"

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I stopped to ask a *sadhu*, saying,
"O man of ash and bowl,
Can *you* not tell me where to find
Old India's peerless soul?"

"Perhaps I could," the *sadhu* said,
"I know a thing or two.
But why not ask the *yogi* first?
He'd be more use to you."

But the *yogi*, entangled in Yoga, declared,
As he hitched either foot round a shoulder,
"Go, ask of the dancing-girl. May be she'll tell,
If your eye's strong enough, sir, to hold her.



"With movements voluptuous and twirling of hips"

Photo: S. JEPSON



"In field and in village, beneath sunny skies"

Photo: S. JEPSON

Part 2: I Find the Soul

O India,

The sweet, simple patience and charm
Of thy countryside's peace

on thy vast surface lies,
And here, in *ahimsa*, the seeker sees mirrored
In field and in village, beneath sunny skies,
The Great Soul of thee.

The rocks that keep back the sea's
stern encroachment.

The milk of the coconut
that grows on the palm,

The sheep in thy pastures.....
all these are ramparts
Preserving thy charm.

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Thy flowers !

With them thou art wont to
express all thy feelings,
To give joyous welcome, bid sadder adieu,
And place at the feet of deities, begging
That they will continue protection to you
And your people.

The red of the blood from thy heart, ever beating,
Is mixed in their petals with flecks of bright gold
And, symbolised thus, a story of sacrifice,
Hospitality, courage, is so simply told
To him who can read it.

The yellows, the purples,
 the Flame-of-the-Forest,
The parasite orchids of delicate hue,
The slender white trumpets, exquisitely scented,
Oft carpet thy bosom like blessings that you
 Bestow on your people.

✻

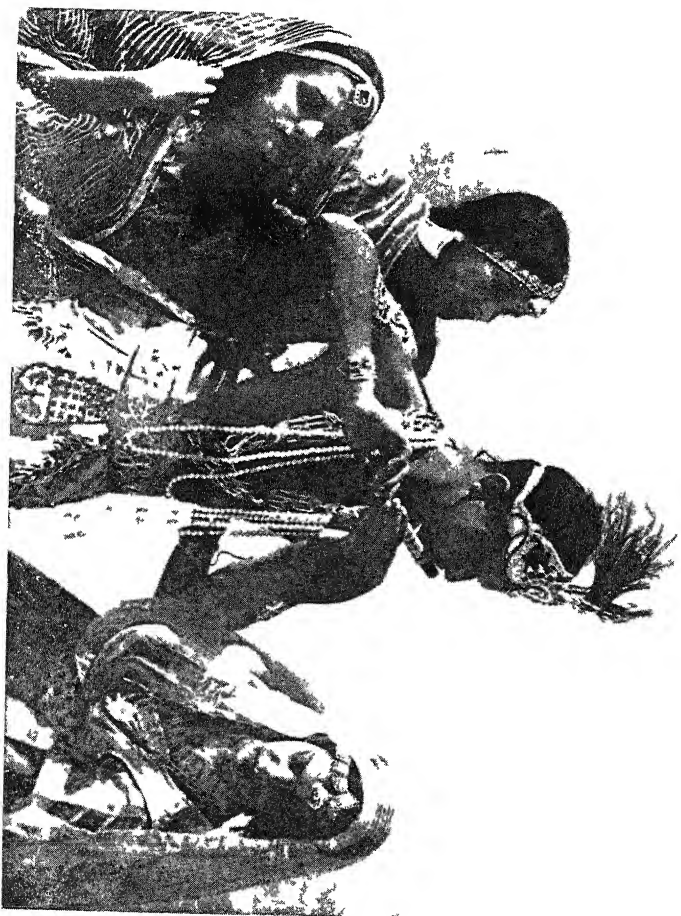
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"Thy flowers!"
(Gold Mohur tree in foreground)

Photo S JEPSON



"Thy dances!"
(Krishna and the Gopis)

Photo S JEPSON

Thy temples !

They did not aspire to grow up like Babel,
So continue to glow like gems in thy crown,
Telling of faiths that preserve their dominion
While sword-carven empires wither and drown
In a welter of blood.

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Thy dances !

Not the modern creations that tell us so little,
But those of the Past from Mythology's womb,
Which tell of the passions, romances and battling
Of those who defied both the pyre and the tomb,
Thy immortals.

In ponderous costumes as splendid as any,
In make-up that takes many hours to put on,
With actions alone, since words are forbidden,
The dance Kathakali has long carried on
In its ancient tradition.

In Manipur State, called the Bali of India,
That small, radiant jewel in Assam's great hills,
The people just dance for
the sheer joy of dancing,
And as cure for their ills.

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Thy art !

The chisels of masters to stone life imparting,
And returning to wood the pulse of the tree... ..
Gems of their skill they have
left through the ages
To beautify thee.

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Thy people !

By caste and religion divided once widely,
Today show an urge to belong
To a nation, and be, as are other great nations,
United and strong.

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Your health!

To break from the past when our
knowledge of hygiene
Was little, is one of your efforts today.
Your people have learnt many cures for diseases,
But know that it's better to keep them away
By measures preventive.

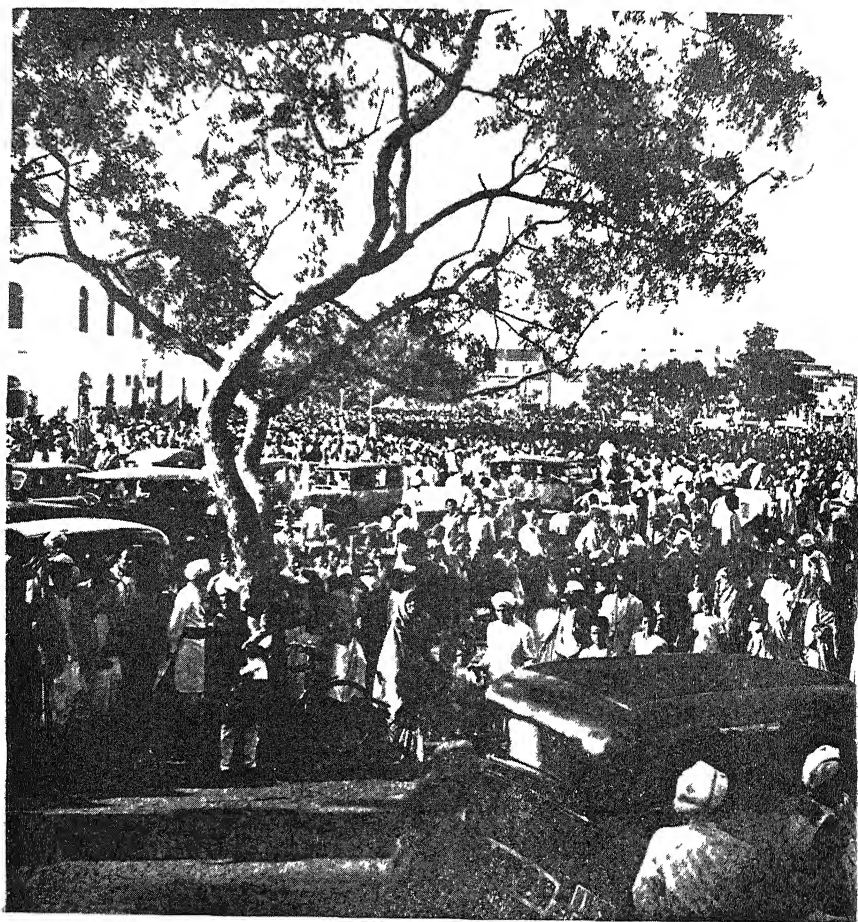
You teach them that food is not merely intended
To stave hunger off, but is pleasantly full
Of power to revitalise body and mind, but
'Twill only exert its maximum pull
When properly mixed.



"In make-up that takes many hours to put on"

(Kathakali dancer)

Photo S JEPSON



"Thy people!"

Photo · S. JEPSON

The old fatalism which thinned populations
Is almost extinct, and its passing has brought
A desire to give to your millions of children
A better foundation in body and thought
For their future.

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Thy toilers !

The tools of their trade by time unaffected,
The drudge of their day in sunshine or rain,
The profits so small from their labours herculean
—One would think that they might,
but they seldom, complain,
Do these hard working people.

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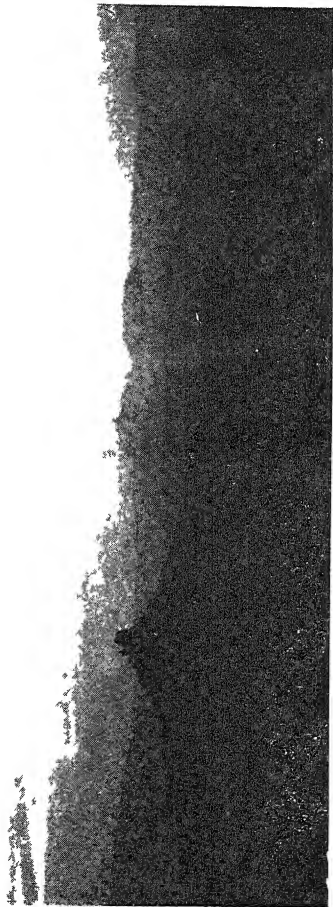
Your mothers !

Like Time and the Brook, they toil on forever,
Legion their tasks and short is their day,
With something that's always needing attention,
It's little of respite that e'er comes the way
Of these great-hearted women.



Photo S JEPSON

"You mothers!"



"As sets the sun in roseate glory far"

Photo S JEPSON

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